

Scarlet Street®

The Magazine of Mystery and Horror

No. 27/\$6.95 U.S./\$8.95 Can./Int.



In
This
Issue...



Fay Wray

The Great Frankenstein
and Dracula Revival

Robert Wise

DISPLAY UNTIL APRIL 15, 1998

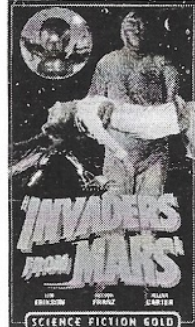
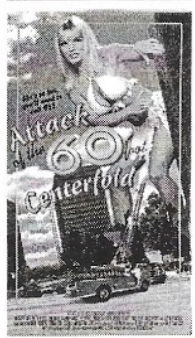
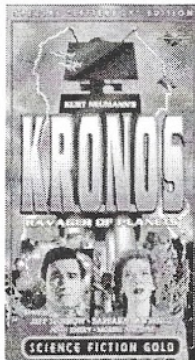


Sherlock Holmes on the Titanic
The Curse of the Cat People

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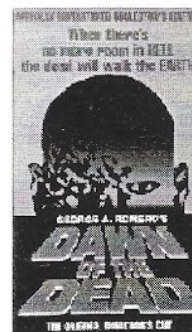
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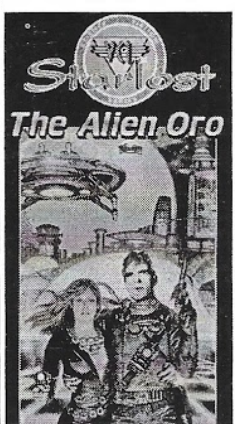
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 ASSAULT OF KILLER BIMBOS
 ATTACK OF 60 FOOT CENTERFOLD
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 DAY TIME ENDED
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 DRACULA PRINCE OF DARKNESS
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MANIAC COP
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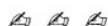
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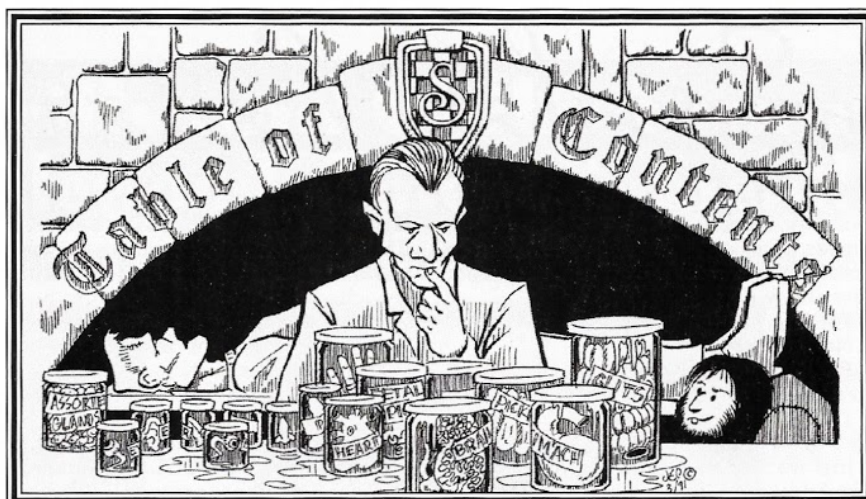


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COVER: Fay Wray and King Kong in *KING KONG* (1933),
Fay Wray and Joel McCrea in *THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME* (1932),
Fay Wray and Bruce Cabot in *KING KONG*.

Scarlet Letters

Thank you so much for forwarding the copies (*Scarlet Street* #25). I intend to send one to my 98-year-old mother. I am sure she will like it.

Patricia Neal
New York, NY

Patricia Neal was interviewed in *Scarlet Street* #25 in conjunction with our coverage of *THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL*.

Just wanted to drop you a line and let you know how much I enjoyed the David Manners interview in *Scarlet Street* #26. I worked for eight years as a reporter and film critic for the *Courier-Journal* in Louisville, so I understand how challenging it can be to get usable material out of elderly, uncooperative subjects. It would have been nice to hear a little more about his horror pictures, but I've heard he's extremely reluctant to broach the subject at all. I admired Rick McKay's ingenuity in getting him on this topic by using a laptop. Very clever. I thought McKay provided a revealing portrait of Manners, which in large part did explain (at least, by inference) why he left Hollywood after such a brief stay.

I never felt Manners contributed much to *DRACULA* or *THE MUMMY*, but I loved him in *THE BLACK CAT*, as "the world's foremost author . . . of unimportant books!" That line kept coming back to me while you discussed his writing career. You didn't provide very much background on his books, but I gathered the impression they were sort of a thirties version of *The Celestine Prophecy* or some such nonsense.

A friend of mine recently interviewed Fay Wray, and I understand she's in far better shape than Manners. I look forward to *Scarlet Street*'s conversation with her!

Mark Clark
Monroeville, PA

In *A HUNGER FOR HORROR* (SS #26), Gary Don Rhodes recalls the events that precipitated the horror "revival" of 1939. When Regina Theatre manager E.M. Umann decided to screen the vintage triple feature of *DRACULA*, *FRANKENSTEIN*, and *SON OF KONG*, he indirectly breathed new life into a moribund genre. Other theaters soon followed suit, which ultimately induced Universal to lens *SON OF FRANKENSTEIN*. If not for Umann's original initiative, we might never have seen Karloff's third (and final) turn as the Monster, or Lugosi's startling interpretation of Ygor.

Rhodes is one of the best writers working the genre beat today. Transcending the role of critic, Rhodes is an historian, diligently compiling fascinating and useful cinematic facts.

His piece on the *DRACULA*/*FRANKENSTEIN* double bill and its success in various cities was masterfully researched. Rhodes is also an expert of scholarly proportions (a Rhodes scholar?) on the subject of Bela Lugosi.

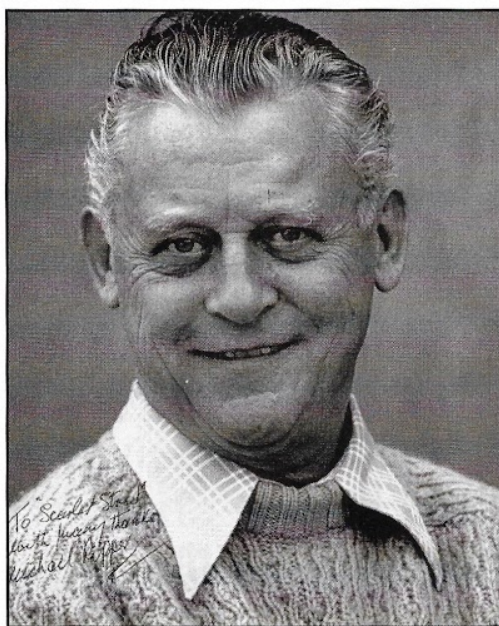
Scarlet Street #26 includes a rare interview with David Manners, best known to horror-film fans for *DRACULA*, *THE MUMMY*, and *THE BLACK CAT*. The last surviving *DRACULA* cast member, Manners gave the intriguing impression that cinematographer Karl Freund was more actively involved in the production than was director Tod Browning.

I will continue to read and support *Scarlet Street*.

Timothy M. Walters
Muskogee, OK

I've been meaning to e-mail you for some time concerning the interview with David Manners. Being a longtime fan of Mr. Manners, I just wanted to tell you how much I really enjoyed the article. It's touching and sad and funny and so many other things, all wrapped together. So many people, including myself, have waited so long for something like this. I

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Michael Ripper



truly think it'll be recognized as one of the best works of its nature for years to come. Bravo!

Chris Pustorino
UniPics@aol.com

In his personal memoir (SS #26), David J. Skal manages to speak frankly without losing his dignity. Meanwhile, Rick McKay's nursing home interview with David Manners works so well precisely because McKay doesn't do much to protect his own dignity. Again and again, he sets himself up as a target, by using slightly patronizing words like "feisty" that goad the wicked old man into dropping the pose of feebleness to take a few potshots at his interviewer. Kevin G. Shinnick's terrific interview with Stephen Geoffreys answers a lot of questions I wondered about when I wrote my *FRIGHT NIGHT* article. Ditto Danny Savello's interview with Roddy McDowall.

Lelia Loban
Falls Church, VA

I first met David Manners not long after he moved to Wood Glen Hall in the summer of 1987. Once a month, I played the organ there and David loved the old songs.

David fell several times in more recent years, suffering stress fractures in his lower back. Five years ago, he fell and was unable to ambulate without a walker. At that time, Wood Glen didn't allow walkers. The administrator told him that, if he could learn to walk with a cane, he would be able to return. David came to our facility for rehabilitation. He got to the point where he could walk using two canes and Wood Glen took him back. Six months passed and he fell again. This time he came to our facility to stay. That was June of 1993.

Last October, I took David to the emergency hospital. He was suffering from a bladder infection that was also affecting his liver. They kept him in the hospital and, with antibiotics, he recovered in four days. When it was time to come home, he didn't have the stamina to get out of bed. They kept him over for rehabilitation for two more weeks to get him up to speed. When the Physical Therapist would try to work with him, he would say, "Please leave me alone."

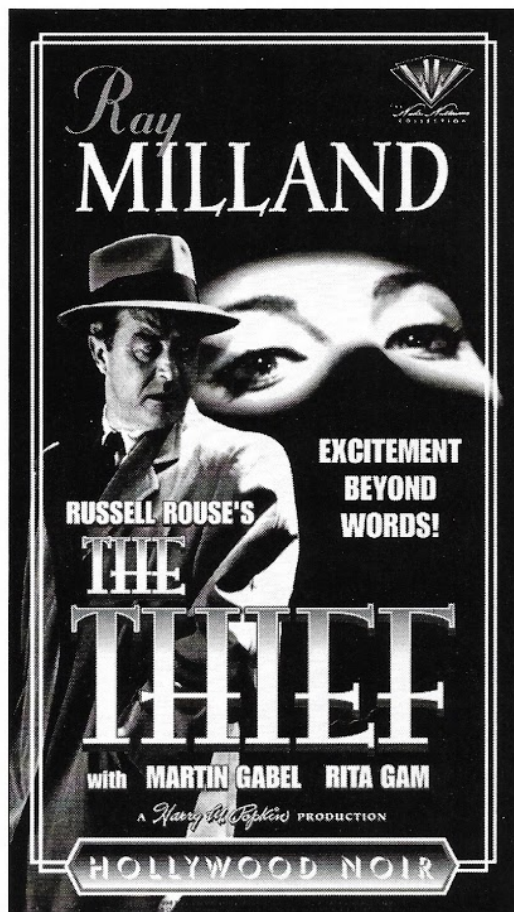
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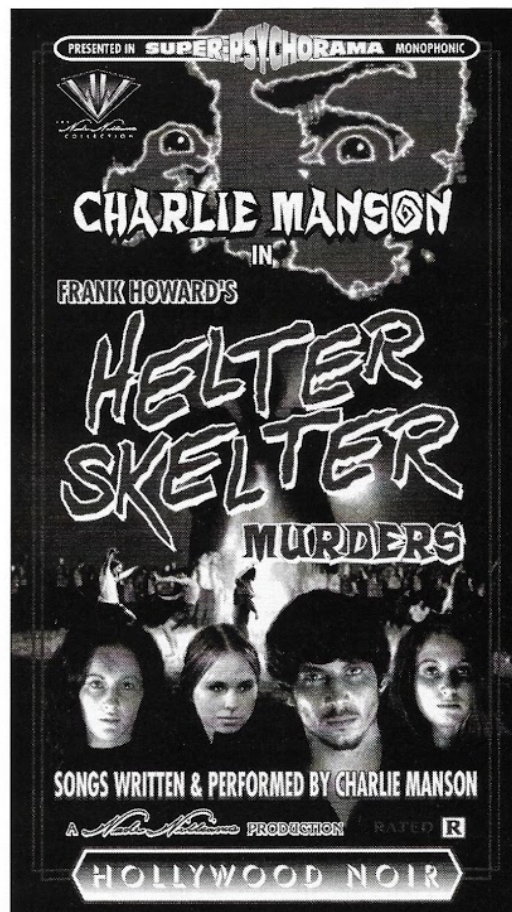
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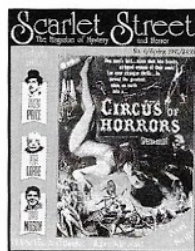
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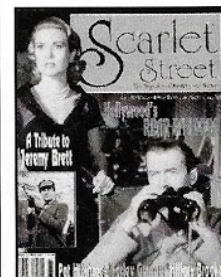
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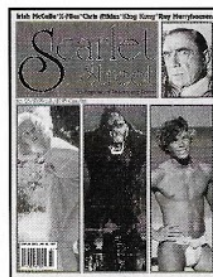
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SCARLET LETTERS

Continued from page 4

I'm an old man and just want to die." Unfortunately, they didn't know how to nudge him and they didn't know he was reaching out to them in his way. He totally lost his endurance. He wasn't expected to live very long.

That was a year ago. He was part of our extended family for three and a half years. We can usually motivate him to keep going and get him out of his funk. We know what a good actor he is, too . . . boy, do we ever!

A couple of months ago, the chaplain from Valle Verde phoned to tell me he was giving David last rites. I dropped everything and rushed to his side. I entered his room and said, "David" . . . loud, but tenderly. He very softly groaned, "Yes?" It looked like he was on his way out. He opened one eye just a little bit and, in his old familiar voice, said "Marge!" He was playing possum!

When Rick McKay first contacted us this past summer, saying he wanted to interview David, I suggested that he come see us first. I really did not think David would agree to a meeting.

Rick proved to be something to behold. I had good vibes about him from the moment we met, and knew he would not do anything to make David uncomfortable. We know David so well. When he gets pushed to answer questions, he quickly gets sick and has to lie down or pretends to drift off to sleep, or lets his upper denture drop down. David agreed to talk to Rick on more than one occasion.

Rick picked up on David. I cannot believe he got to know him so well during a few visits. Rick knows the wonder of David, the beauty and the bliss, and he also picked up on the other, game-playing David (the actor).

We were amazed that Rick got to know David so well. His interpretation of what David didn't say as well as his comments were right on target. Anyone who has ever been close to David will pick up on every word. It was an uncanny experience for me, because I felt like a "mouse in the corner" at the interview. I probably shook my head most of the time thinking, "Wow! Rick really got to know this guy . . . he really got to his center!" After the pancake bit, I found myself laughing until I cried. Then my crying turned to sobbing. I couldn't understand what was going on with me.

It is not a coincidence that we have met so. Rick McKay must be part of the divine plan for David.

Marge Mason
Montecito, CA

I adore your magazine and its ability to be adult (in every sense), critical, yet big-hearted in profiling our love of past and present TV and cinema. People keep saying it's the "end of the millennium" as the reasons for the nineties' love of things "noir." I disagree. I think it's our voyeuristic fascination with

watching the industrial machine spinning out of control—like the merry-go-round tampered with by Robert Walker in *STRANGERS ON A TRAIN*—until final breakdown.

We're holding on to what teddy bears we have left for a sense of balance: horror films (that express our anger and decry the madness around us); *STAR TREK* (a hope for a better existence, which at this point most people don't believe in); and cars in which we hope to make our escape.

Whether what I just said is true or makes sense, I want to say how much I appreciate your magazine. I'd get a subscription, except I get a thrill hunting Hollywood haunts in search of it.

My only complaint is that you don't have more articles and columns. Otherwise, I'm your number one fan . . . er, well, at least in the top 20.

Pamela Auditore
pam@loop.com

More articles? More columns? Well, in a sense, Pam, you'll be getting exactly that, as Scarlet Street goes bimonthly!

Once again, *Scarlet Street* proves to be the most diverse and interesting magazine on the block. Who else would be smart enough to run an interview with Stephen Geoffreys (SS #26), one of the most underrated actors around?

The mid-eighties brought a whole crop of new, young performers to the screen, but was there anybody comparable to Stephen? The publicity machines didn't exactly work overtime to sell him to the public as a star, but I defy anyone to watch *FRIGHT NIGHT*, *976-EVIL*, or *HEAVEN HELP US* without coming away with an indelible impression of Stephen and his unique talents. He was, and is, offbeat, manic, charming, devilish, touching, funny, bizarre, and sexy, too.

Happily, I was able to meet Stephen when he appeared on the New York stage in *MAGGIE MAGALITA* and *SONGS ON A SHIPWRECKED SOFA*, and got to know him intimately. He is certainly one of the nicest and most accessible actors in the business; always warm and appreciative toward fans.

Unfortunately, Hollywood too quickly ran out of ideas on how to utilize somebody so distinctive. As pleasing as it is to see Stephen in all his natural splendor in *HUNK HOTEL*, this is hardly the direction in which his admirers had hoped his career would go. Perhaps there are some people with clout in the entertainment business who are among your readers and have had their memories of Stephen Geoffreys jogged after reading your interview. In my opinion, there's hardly been a movie made in the past decade that doesn't have a role Stephen would have been perfect for . . .

Barry Monush
Metuchen, NJ

I never write to magazines, but I had to drop you a line to say how much I really appreciate your publication. I

work in a bookstore, and yours is one of the few magazines that actually sells out every issue. And thanks to your mag, I have been made aware of several books that I felt should be carried in our store. Keep up the good work!

The reason for my letter (besides the praise), is to correct something said by Drew Sullivan in his review of *MARS ATTACKS!* (SS #26). Like Drew, I am a huge fan of Danny Elfman's scores for various films, but Tim Burton's *ED WOOD* is not one of them!

That score was, in fact, composed and produced by Howard Shore (who is probably best known for scoring many of David Cronenberg's films).

Other than that, I have no complaints about your publication (despite what others may feel regarding the content). I look forward to each and every issue.

Charles Duncan

CDuncan105@aol.com

We appreciate the correction, Charles. By way of punishment, we tied Drew Sullivan to an overhead beam and whipped him. He hasn't stopped thanking us yet!

Let me add my voice to the chorus of praise for Rick McKay's sensitive, thought-provoking and superb interview with 97-year-old David Manners at an LA nursing home.

The piece has very little to do with horror movies, adds almost nothing to film history, and offers little new about the Hollywood of Manners' youth. The interview focuses instead on the gentle art of inquiry, when all the subject wants to do is find syrup for his pancakes. And there lies the revelation, for McKay's interview is the stuff of reality, a set piece in a drawing-room drama where everyone is a suspect and the man in the wheelchair holds all the cards.

To deal with the sometimes delicate, always feisty leading man, McKay is at turns tender and tough, tentative and tenacious. *DRACULA*, it turns out, doesn't matter much at all to Manners.

Hollywood was only five years of his life, after all, and is so outweighed by the decades of the rest of him that movie buffs are merely a nuisance. McKay realizes his peripheral role, and circles and parries and treats Manners with the respect the reader feels. It is, in short, a wonderful, human, terrific read. It could have been a talk with anyone of advanced age on any day with death near and life not yet done.

Memories, it seems, are precious and tightly held, things not so easily shared. It is to McKay's credit that he lets us in on his mission, cheering both men as they spend two days parrying with the skills of gentlemen. Fabulous reading.

If you haven't picked this up, do so quickly. Nice stuff, Richard and Rick. And next month Fay Wray!

David Colton
Arlington, VA

And this month Fay Wray! Meanwhile, if you've missed the David Manners inter-

Continued on page 10

Frankly Scarlet



Well, I must admit I'm a trifle disappointed, a touch saddened, but it seems that the recent announcement of a Montgomery Clift biopic has absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with *Scarlet Street* going "bi." I thought it might be in homage or something, or perhaps be the beginnings of a new kind of "bi" chic: bimonthly, bisexual, bypass surgery . . .

Anyway! You hold in your jungle-red claws, dear Scarlet Streeter, the first bimonthly issue of *Scarlet Street: The Magazine of Mystery and Horror*, and you'll have noticed that there have been a few changes made. For one thing, you'll certainly have noticed that our price has gone up. Slightly. It's not something we chose lightly to do, but we've held on to our beloved old price for six years, through paper cost increases and other fiscal terrors, and now it's time to either face a li'l economic music or turn in our tubas. We're sure you'd rather have *Scarlet Street* at a measly one-buck increase than have no *Scarlet Street* at all. Right? Of course, right!

Of course, you can immediately return to our beloved old price by subscribing via the coupon on page seven, which saves you a dollar off every issue. That way you can pretend nothing has happened—always a good method, I've found, for getting through life. And it helps keep us thriving, too, since your cash isn't carved up by stores and distributors, but comes directly to us in one lump sum . . .

What else do I have to tell you? Well, you'll also note that we're a few pages shorter than usual. Again, economics have come into play here, but we've made a concerted effort to insure that you're still getting your money's worth. How, you ask? By slightly decreasing the size of our typefaces so that, fewer pages notwithstanding, you'll still have as much to mull over as you always had—without eye strain or the need of a Sherlockian spy glass. (I'll be brutally honest, gang: *Scarlet Street's* type has always been a little large because age has caught up with my never-excellent eyesight. But I've got

new reading glasses, now, and if I can read *Scarlet Street*, you can read *Scarlet Street* . . .)

So that's about it, Street People—a few modest changes here and there, but nothing, I trust, that will seriously mar your manic enjoyment of your fave mag. (We are your fave mag, aren't we?) Besides, this is our anniversary issue and we've got lots and lots to celebrate, not the least of which is our exclusive interview with the most-requested-by-our-readers star of some of the greatest films of Hollywood's Golden Age . . .

Fay Wray!

Lemme say that again: Fay Wray!!

One more time: Fay Wray!!!

Fay Wray, resplendent in the few wretched rags left her by the curious paws of the Eighth Wonder of the World, KING KONG!



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Fay Wray, who devoutly wishes she'd never made VAMPIRE BAT . . .

There are those out there who will tell you that fandom is a dry well, that every last drop of ink has already been spent writing about every mystery and horror movie ever made or interviewing everyone who was ever in one of 'em. Piffle, I say! Yes, and balderdash! There is always something new to write about an old movie, provided the writer

comes to it with a keen mind and a fresh approach. The wonderful Lelia Loban has been doing just that for years, now, and does so again with this issue's piece on THE CURSE OF THE CAT PEOPLE. And there is always something new to learn about the folks who made the movies, as Rick McKay proved with last issue's much-praised David Manners interview, and as he does so again with Fay Wray.

It amazes and pleases me that, as the Golden Age of Hollywood drifts further and further into the misty past, there is still gold to be mined from that glittering era. Very few fans expected to be reading a David Manners interview in 1997, or a Fay Wray interview in 1998, I'm sure. And I'm also sure that very few fans expected they'd be able to go to a brand new movie in 1998 and thrill to a touching performance by Gloria Stuart, star of THE INVISIBLE MAN and THE OLD DARK HOUSE! The Glamorous Gloria was nominated for a Golden Globe Award for her shining work in TITANIC (losing, unfortunately, to Kim Basinger for her work—also good—in L.A. CONFIDENTIAL), and we're all keeping our fingers crossed that an Oscar is in her future.

Oh, and need I add that, next issue, *Scarlet Street* will be featuring an exclusive interview with the one and only Gloria Stuart? Naw, you know us too well . . .

In closing, I want to welcome some talented new writers and interviewers to the Street, both from last issue and this present edition. I hope we'll be seeing much, much more of John F. Black, Mark Clark, Jonathan Malcolm Lampley, Rick McKay, Brooke Perry, Gary Don Rhodes, David J. Skal, Michael Spampinato, and David Wilke in our pages.

We have a number of exciting new advertisers gracing our pages, and I needn't remind you that, by patronizing them, you'll also be helping us. Besides, when you see all the neat, quality stuff they're selling, I know you won't be able to resist . . .

So that's all for now, Scarlet Streeters. I trust you'll find this latest incarnation of your fave mag (we are your fave mag, aren't we?) to be up to our usual high, always artistic, sometimes controversial standards. And if it's not, I'm sure you'll let us know. But, frankly, I'm not worried. I've said it before and I'll say it again: stick with us, 'cause the beast is yet to come!!!

Richard Valley

SCARLET LETTERS

Continued from page 8

view, we direct you immediately to the back-issue coupon lurking on the bottom of page seven. It's something you won't want to have missed.

✉

Thanks for David Stuart Davies' tribute to Ronald Howard (SS #25). My own favorite appearance by the actor was in one especially horror-laden episode of THRILLER: "Well of Doom," originally aired on February 28, 1961. In addition to Howard, it featured Henry Daniell, Torin Thatcher, and Richard Kiel. Despite a MARK OF THE VAMPIRE-like, too-pat ending, it retained the best of the Universal Golden Age touches that the studio's Revue Television unit could produce.

One THRILLER episode I remember seeing as a kid, but haven't seen recently, scared the daylights out of me. I believe it featured Michael Gough as a husband who murdered his wives and hid their bodies in the staircase. Does anyone know the title of the episode?

Just one quibble with your assessment of Ronald Howard's Sherlock Holmes series. With titles such as "The Haunted Gainsborough," "The Belligerent Ghost," and "The Laughing Mummy," many episodes contained more than a few horror elements. I thought they held up quite well when viewing them recently.

Brian McFadden
Bernardsville, NJ

✉

The monster mag boom of the 1990s has produced such a plethora of product that it's not always an easy task to separate the good from the bad—or the ugly. However, *Scarlet Street* has been a thing of beauty almost from its very beginning, and never more so than in its landmark 26th issue. If anyone has any doubt as to the leadership among genre magazines, they have only to look at this remarkable 80-page wonder!

The issue was filled with informative, insightful, and charming articles and interviews, chief among them David J. Skal's delightful Dracula memoir, Gary Don Rhodes' fact-filled history of the 1939 horror revival, Kevin J. Shinick's revealing talk with Stephen Geofreys, Danny Savello's equally revelatory dialogue with Roddy McDowall, and Lelia Loban's fresh take on the classic FRIGHT NIGHT.

Lest your regular columnists feel a bit slighted, let me say that the News Hound, David Stuart Davies, and Forrest J Ackerman were all up to snuff.

But the crowning achievement was the sad, funny, heartwrenching interview with David Manners. All too often, readers hoping to learn about stars of the past are presented with a series of stories not about the stars themselves, but about the people they knew. Mags such as *Fangoria* inundate us with such "by the numbers" interviews and "What was it like to work with (fill in the blank)" questions. Read one such interview and watch a movie starring the interviewee; you'll feel no different

about him or her, because you've learned nothing about the person.

Not so with the Manners interview. I will never watch a David Manners film again without looking at this actor differently, without looking at him as a human being. Words cannot fully express the gratitude I feel toward *Scarlet Street* for the indescribable beauty of this look at the life of David Manners.

Paula Weizmann
Chicago, IL

✉

Just wanted to thank you for the fantastic David Manners interview. You pulled off the amazing feat of making the reader feel like he was sitting beside the two of you. One of the best and most entertaining interviews ever!

Dan Sweet
Address withheld

✉

Scarlet Street #26 was recently purchased by me and how I was entertained! David Skal's article HIM AND ME: A PERSONAL SLICE OF THE DRACULA CENTURY: I was glad to read about his early years and when his lust for vampires came into existence. Also, I know what it is like to work very hard on a project (my book of 23 years, *Let's Scare 'Em!*) and finally have it published—but not exactly in the way anticipated.

Thanks are in order for the Rick McKay interview with David Manners. Bravo! I'm so elated when I see someone care enough to print the truth about someone. Mr. Manners—or David, as he is known by some—turned his back on

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Hollywood many years ago. He'll chat about some of the people he knew, but those "horror pictures" are far away from him. I've always respected his wishes about this. In turn, I've had a 22-year correspondence with him, and he's a contributor to my book. I liked the interview so much that I xeroxed it and added those pages to his notebook of letters I keep (over 60 pages). That interview is David Manners. He is truly a most dear man and I'm sure Mr. McKay was enchanted.

I've been a fan of *Scarlet Street* since I was introduced to it in 1993 via John Brunas, who is a very kind person and contributor to *Let's Scare 'Em!* I take this opportunity to congratulate you on the success of *Scarlet Street*. I wish you many more years of continued success.

Rick Atkins
Chicago, IL

I was shocked to read the description "superb" applied in the review *FLASH GORDON CONQUERS THE LASERDISC* (SS #25). I returned my laserdisc in disgust for a refund after scanning portions of it.

The material used to make the video transfer for the laserdisc was obviously the 16mm prints produced for TV syndication in the fifties. (The serials' original main titles are replaced by the "Space Soldiers" appellation.) Those TV prints were made cheaply and quickly: the picture is somewhat soft, the contrast is washed out, there are print timing errors. The audio has the narrow frequency response of 16mm.

King Features has master video transfers made from surviving 35mm mate-

rial. The picture is sharp and the contrast excellent. The audio has a much wider dynamic range with less noise. There is one chapter in which a short sequence is missing, but that could easily be remedied on video.

Why weren't the superior 35mm materials used for the laserdisc transfers? Although I can't answer the question, I would guess that the "Space Soldiers" versions of the serials have fallen into public domain (and are therefore cheap), or alternately, the laserdisc producer didn't know or didn't care about the superior transfers possessed by King Features.

Richard H. Bush
Meredon, CT

Reader Harry H. Long blundered badly in his contention that I did not read the J.B. Priestley novel, *The Old Dark House*, before commenting on it in my laser review of James Whale's marvelous film adaptation (SS #23). Not only did I read the novel, in my book, *Universal Horrors* (McFarland, 1990), I compared it to the film version at a length hardly possible in a laser review. I do sympathize, however, After reading Mr. Long's letter, I came away convinced that he did not read my review. Otherwise, he would not have chided me that the movie follows the action of the novel rather closely, a point I precisely expressed.

The basis of the complaint is that I failed to realize that Priestley's intention was to write, in Mr. Long's words, "a very dry parody . . . of old dark house thrillers." This may have been the writer's intention to a certain ex-

tent, but it's hard to deny that Priestley was keenly interested in his psychology of his characters, an aspect Whale treated superficially at best. There are traces of social satire in the novel, just as there are in Priestley's *The Last Holiday*. (Perhaps Long regards this as a parody as well.) However, there's a considerable difference between that kind of satire and the broad way Whale poked fun at the whole genre of thrillers. Whale tended to stay outside of the drama, emphasizing (through comic exaggeration) the absurdity of his characters. I don't think the same was true of Priestley.

Michael Brunas
Palisades Park, NJ

In Raymond Binacki's letter, and your response to it, in SS #26, the question of the availability of the serial and feature versions of *TARZAN THE FEARLESS* (1933) is raised. Here is some information which may be of help.

Contrary to your stated impression that the serial version of this title is "still out there," in fact it has never been available in any home-own medium, not even 16mm, to my knowledge. I don't think it was even shown on TV back in the fifties, when most of the other serials were downloaded into the living rooms of then-youngsters such as myself. Anyway, I've never met anyone who's seen it. Whether any prints exist or not is unknown. As you may well be aware, two Republic serials, *KING OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED* (1940) and *KING OF THE MOUNTIES* (1942), were considered lost for decades, but in fact Republic serial ex-

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pert Jack Mathis has had prints in his attic all the time, which he just recently had mastered on videotape and sold in "limited edition" copies to bidders. So, too, could FEARLESS be buried in someone's collection, waiting for an opportune moment to be sprung. However, as a published effort, it may well have been pulled when Lesser contracted with Fox, and later RKO, to make Tarzan features. After all, unless either of those studios wanted to take up distribution of the serial, Lesser would have effectively been competing with himself—and his patrons—with keeping the serial alive through other companies. Additionally, he had already stopped actively distributing (as Principal Distributing Corp.) by 1935 or 1936.

As to the feature, you were partly right, that FEARLESS is available in feature format. However, the version which has been marketed by multiple public domain distributors and has also shown up on TV "Tarzan Theater" settings—most lately on AMC—is not Lesser's original "revolutionary" feature version. Rather, it is drawn from the entire 12 chapters, and may be relatively new as a feature. I've heard two stories as to its origin: one, that it was edited in England during the forties, or two, that it was edited in the US during the early sixties, using a British release-print of the serial as its source. In either case, this explains why the main title reads "Wardour Pictures present":

Wardour was the British distributor of the serial. This feature never had a theatrical run in the States, however. But if the feature was cut as recently as the sixties, this raises hope that a print of the FEARLESS serial might be located in the UK. Just this past month, Liberty Video put out tapes of Republic's JUNGLE GIRL (1941), also believed lost, using a just-unearthed British film print for the source.

As to Lesser's original "revolutionary" feature, it was just a cutting together of the first four chapters of the FEARLESS serial, apparently with the resolution to Chapter Four's cliffhanger (from the start of Chapter Five) and a quick denouement finding the girl safely in Tarzan's arms, tacked on at the end to give it the semblance of a feature. Unfortunately, the main villain remained at large, which is why it couldn't hold up as a feature alone, without the remaining eight episodes. Since most, if not all, of those first four episodes are used in the currently available feature print, you can get an idea of how Lesser's "feature" must have looked to befuddled reviewers, by stopping your VCR at the point, about an hour through, where Tarzan rescues the girl, her father, and the chief villain from a lion in the Temple of Zar. (Conversely, by watching this entire feature cut, you get a sampling of the entire 12-episode serial.)

Lesser's intent all along was for theaters to book his feature first and follow




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it with the eight episodes. But some theater owners didn't want to do that, or didn't understand the concept; and some reviewers probably saw the feature without noticing that it was to be followed by the remaining chapters, and reviewed it as a stand-alone; and the novelty—or, rather, the marketing strategy, which is really what his technique was—failed.

Rich Wannen
Fairway, MS

I have decided to subscribe to *Scarlet Street*, since it's better for you than buying it from a store. Also, I want to be a part of what you're doing. When I first read *Scarlet Street*, I could have been persuaded that you interviewed me personally as to the kind of magazine I'd like to see.

Having said that, I'm going to climb on my soap-box and growl. I am a long-time fan of THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL. In the article (SS #25), the writer [Lelia Loban] seemed to take Klaatu to task over his statement about "profitable enterprises." Well what did she think a higher civilization would be interested in? Look at our history. In 1607, we founded a colony in Virginia to grow and export tobacco. By 1614, we were doing so. The pilgrims and their religious intolerance didn't come on the scene until 1620. Profitable enterprise lead our ancestors here. Whether they were English, Spanish, or Dutch, the profit motive is always what stirred

people beyond their borders. Do you think other civilizations will be different? (From this, you may deduce that I am a devout capitalist.)

On the subject of SEX AND THE SINGLE BAT: the article was interesting and entertaining. It seems to me, however, that the straight and gay communities agree on one point: if two men have a deep and abiding friendship, they must be gay . . . and confound it, that is just not so! I think yours is an open-minded magazine and it irritated me to see that prejudice forwarded yet again. (From this, you may deduce that I have been on the receiving end of that accusation.)

Now, I'll simmer down because I have a couple of questions. Boris Karloff did a few TV dramas, including HEART OF DARKNESS and ARSENIC AND OLD LACE. Are they available? If so, they might make a good addition to your video library.

Thanks for letting me hoot and holler. I look forward to your next issue.

Charles Worman
Ferndale, MI

There may be some bootlegs out there, but the Karloff telefilms you mention are not legally available, more's the pity.

Just a brief note of correction on Steve Randisi's interview with Billy Gray (SS #25). "When the boy witnesses Klaatu's robot killing two soldiers . . ." He didn't kill them; he rendered them unconscious, as Gray's character tells his

mother that same night. It would be out of character for Klaatu, who is communicating with his robot using a flashlight, to order the death of the soldiers. There is a scene later, when Klaatu is temporarily deceased, in which the robot of its own accord vaporizes two men.

Geoff St. Andrews
gsandrews@sympatico.ca

Great work on the Fu Manchu articles. I find I agree with both Richard Valley and Jeff Seigel, and I love the books because of and in spite of the reasons listed in both articles. (In fact, I was about three-quarters of the way through my latest read-through of the series when I picked up *Scarlet Street* #24.) And Gregory Mank's article on the MGM film was terrific; can you guys turn him loose on the RKO version of SHE? There's been precious little written on it and a lot I'd like to know—such as who the hell was Lansing C. Holden, anyway?

Keep up the terrific work . . . and try to come out more regularly than *Castle of Frankenstein*.

Harry H. Long
Lebanon, PA

Thanks for sending *Scarlet Street* #24. It's always a kick to get it. Your readers are amazing, and are quite a treasure. I have written for more than 100 publications over the last 20 years, and only

once or twice have my pieces received the scrutiny they get in *Scarlet Street*. Even more amazing, when they disagree with me, their comments are intelligent and well-chosen. What more can a writer ask for?

Jeff Seigel
JS.Writer@aol.com

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the NEWS HOUND

The weather outside is frightful, so stay inside and take a biteful of The Hound's media morsels. Bon appetit, Scarlet Streeters . . .

Theatrical Thrills

Now muscling into your local multiplex: SPHERE (Warner Bros.), featuring Dustin Hoffman and Sharon Stone in Michael Crichton's tale of a submerged, centuries-old spaceship; steamy neo-noir mystery thriller PALMETTO (Castle Rock), starring Woody Harrelson and Elizabeth Shue; and John Carpenter's lively fangfest VAMPIRES (Universal), starring James Woods and Sheryl Lee. Jamie Lee Curtis does her best Siggy Weaver impression as she battles a shipboard alien in VIRUS (Universal); it's due in cinemas in March, as is the nifty thriller NIGHTWATCH (Dimension), starring Nick Nolte and Ewan McGregor, and Trimark's tentatively-titled THE MUMMY—no relation to Karloff—featuring Christopher Walken as a mad scientist with a well-wrapped skeleton in his closet. (It's one of those large Walken closets.) Meanwhile, word has it that Brendan (George of the Jungle) Fraser has signed on for a rival MUMMY from Universal. Fraser's people reportedly balked at his starring in a picture with the word "Frankenstein" in the title (necessitating a title change for the upcoming FATHER OF FRANKENSTEIN to GODS AND MONSTERS), but "Mummy" seems acceptable. Isis knows where that leaves the film version of Anne Rice's 1989 novel *The Mummy*, or *Ramses the Damned*, long, long, long in the works . . .

Scheduled for an April appearance is the tasty Touchstone thriller EATERS OF THE DEAD, yet another Crichton adaptation, starring Antonio Banderas as a 10th-Century Arabian courtier who helps a burly band of Vikings fighting mist-shrouded monsters. Also due in April is New Line Cinema's sleek reworking of the baby-boomer TV hit LOST IN SPACE, with Gary Oldman as the villainous Dr. Smith (and nary a bubble-headed booby in sight). The Wes Craven-produced remake of CARNIVAL OF SOULS is also scheduled to surface this spring, featuring Bobbie Phillips (Dr. Bambi from the X-FILES cockroach episode) and Sidney Berger, who co-starred in the 1962 original. And the potential summer blockbusters start dropping like meteors in May, with

DEEP IMPACT (DreamWorks/Paramount), SPECIES 2 (MGM), and GODZILLA (Tri-Star).

Teen Screams

SCREAM-writer Kevin Williamson, the John Hughes of horror, has developed the gory golden touch for tapping into teen fear fandom. Adept at infusing formula horror plots with witty, contemporary dialogue, this trademark combination helped make hits of last year's I SAW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER and SCREAM 2. Coming up next for the 32-year-old Williamson: KILLING MRS. TINGLE, his blackly-comedic directorial debut, concerning a sinister schoolteacher and a ruthless student; THE

storyline. Perhaps she wants to make sure she survives to pick up her paycheck.

Future Creature Features

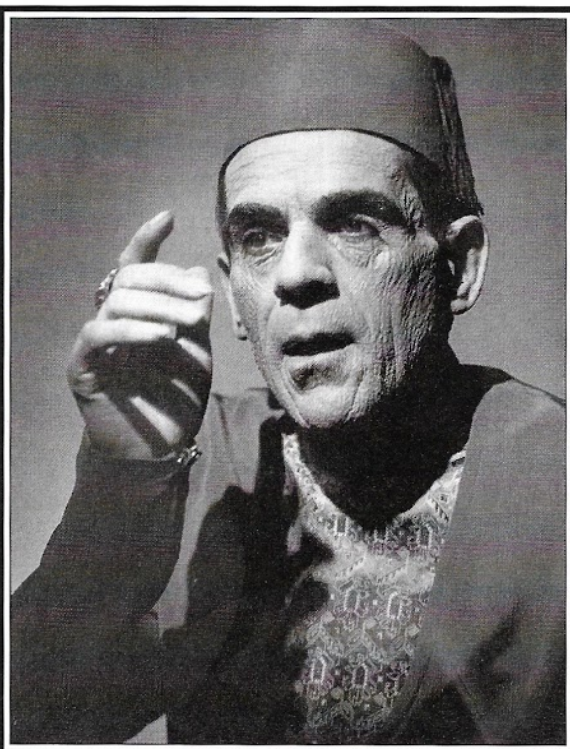
Johnny Depp plays an astronaut who freaks out after a bad space trip in the New Line thriller THE ASTRONAUT'S WIFE. Charlize Theron (MIGHTY JOE YOUNG's new squeeze in the upcoming remake) plays the equally-freaked wife . . . Werewolves on wheels! Wes Craven's next horror outing may be BAD MOON RISING (Dimension), about some seriously unshaven bikers who put the bite on a Southern town . . . And we thought the pigeons were annoying: Barry Sonnenfeld (MEN IN BLACK) is due to produce VESPER (Touchstone), about giant mutant bats that take over Manhattan (the Bronx and Staten Island, too).

Novel Ideas

Stephen King is writing the script for the New Line adaptation of his novel, *Desperation*, about a Nevada mining town that doesn't dig that an ancient evil force has been unearthed. King's novella series *The Green Mile* is also due for filming as a Castle Rock feature, possibly to star Tom Hanks . . . The busy Antonio Banderas soon trades his ZORRO cape for a Jesuit cowl in an adaptation of Mary Doria Russell's *The Sparrow*, about a space-faring cleric . . . Warner Bros. is developing a feature based on Edgar Rice Burroughs' 1929 sci-fi adventure *The Monster Men* . . . Ray Bradbury has written a screenplay for Steven Spielberg based on his 1952 classic *The Martian Chronicles*. Two other sci-fi classics due for filming are C.S. Lewis' *Out of the Silent Planet* and Arthur C. Clarke's *Rendezvous with Rama*.

Comic Relief

THE INCREDIBLE HULK lumbers to life via computer animation in Universal's upcoming big-screen Marvel Comics adaptation. Other comics-based features in the works include Marvel's FANTASTIC FOUR and X-MEN (both from 20th Century Fox); Alan Moore's FROM HELL (New Line), about Jack the Ripper; DC/Vertigo Comics' HOUSE OF SECRETS (Warners); and a whole deluge of Dark Horse projects, including HELLBOY, MYSTERY MEN (toplining Danny DeVito),



It's the War of the Walking Dead, with Christopher Walken and Brendan Fraser following in the footsteps of Boris Karloff in two separate films titled THE MUMMY.

FACULTY, a BODY SNATCHERS-style story in which aliens take over a school's teaching staff; a planned sequel to I SAW WHAT YOU DID . . . and a seventh installment to the HALLOWEEN fright film series, to be directed by Steve (WARLOCK) Miner. It features the return of former scream queen Jamie Lee Curtis who, in addition to recreating her role from the first two chapters, is collaborating with Williamson on the

Continued on page 17

Everybody's trying to get on board the Titanic! No, it's not an 86-years-late death wish; in fact, it's perhaps better to put it this way: everybody's trying to get on board the bandwagon that is currently the Titanic. Even Sherlock Holmes!

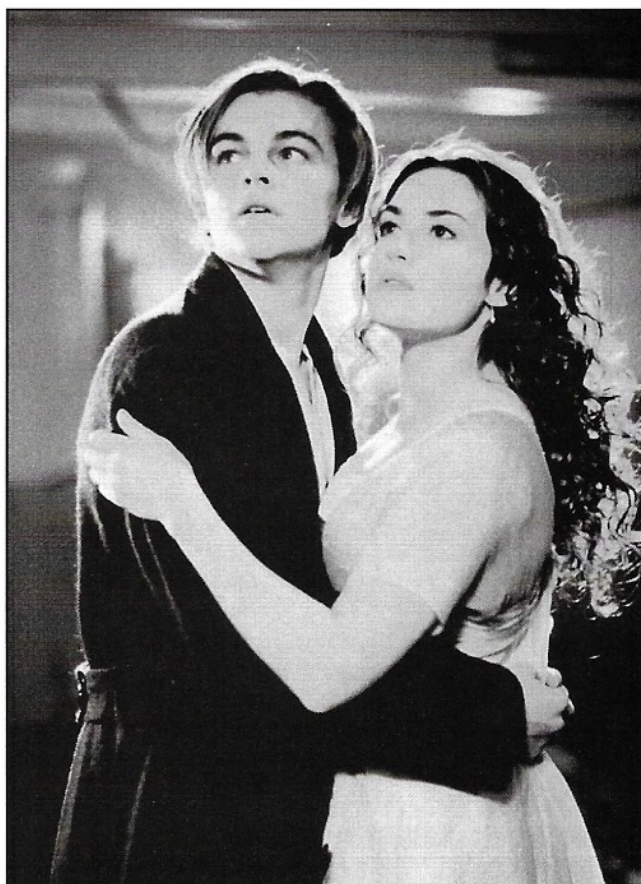
As a matter of fact, the World's First Consulting Detective and his stalwart companion, Dr. John H. Watson, wisely avoided the rush. They clamored aboard the doomed ship well over two years ago, in a first-class pastiche by William Seil entitled *Sherlock Holmes and the Titanic Tragedy* (Breese Books, 1996). (We're all well aware that, if you're going to travel on the Titanic, first-class is the way to go.) Also on board is Colonel James Moriarty, brother of the late Napoleon of Crime, and secret agent Christine Norton, daughter of barrister Godfrey Norton and the only woman who ever outwitted Sherlock Holmes: Irene Adler. Brother Mycroft Holmes also puts in a portly appearance, but, homebody that he is, wisely stays confined to the Diogenes Club when the pride of the White Star Line departs for America.

The Titanic Tragedy takes its inspiration from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's own "The Bruce Partington Plans," penned four years before the Titanic set sail on its first and last journey. Disguised as a Naval Commodore, Holmes accompanies Miss Norton, who has been assigned to deliver top secret submarine plans (the MacGuffin, were this a Hitchcock film) to the U.S. Navy. Inevitably, the plans are stolen and concealed somewhere on board the Great Ship, where the Great Detective must retrieve them before a death-dealing chunk of frozen water sends them to the ocean floor.

It is only after the passengers begin to board the lifeboats that Watson is handed a chilling note from his friend: "My dear Watson, I write these few lines as I prepare to meet Colonel Moriarty, who has sent me an invitation that I simply cannot resist . . ."

Sherlock Holmes and the Titanic Tragedy is a well-written adventure, full of mystery, intrigue, and the true-life tragedy of the title, but it's really only the tip of the iceberg. Two earlier movies concerning the famous event, *TITANIC* (1953) and *A NIGHT TO REMEMBER* (1958), have recently been released on laserdisc. The first (Fox Video, \$39.95) is in the time-honored tradition of Old Hollywood, telling the fictional tale of an unhappy marriage with the oceanic disaster served up as the grand finale. What makes it work as well as it does—and it works surprisingly well—is the quality thesping of stars Clifton Webb and Barbara Stanwyck, though second leads Robert Wagner and Audrey Dalton, attractive but weighed down with lesser material, threaten to sink the ship long before the iceberg does the dirty work. Thelma Ritter puts in a welcome appearance, as a tough old bird clearly based on the Unsinkable Molly Brown. (For some reason, the character has undergone a name change, to Mrs. Young.)

The British-made *A NIGHT TO REMEMBER* (The Criterion Collection, \$99.95) takes a documentary approach, although some of its details have now, after careful examination of the actual wreck, been disproved. (For instance, neither *A NIGHT TO REMEMBER* nor its Hollywood predecessor show the ship splitting in two, since it was not known at the time that this had ever happened.) There are no big Hollywood stars on board this time, but, under the deft direction of future horror-film maestro Roy Ward Baker, Kenneth More, David McCallum, Laurence Naismith, Frank Lawton, Alec McCowen, and



Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet play the young lovers caught up in the true-life tragedy of the *TITANIC*, James Cameron's smash hit of an old-style Hollywood epic.

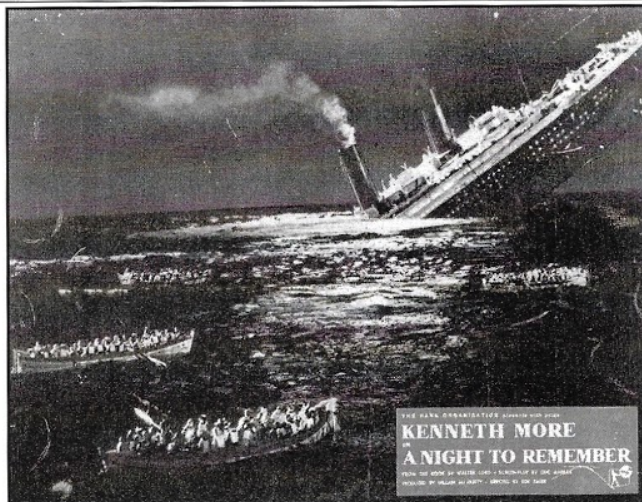
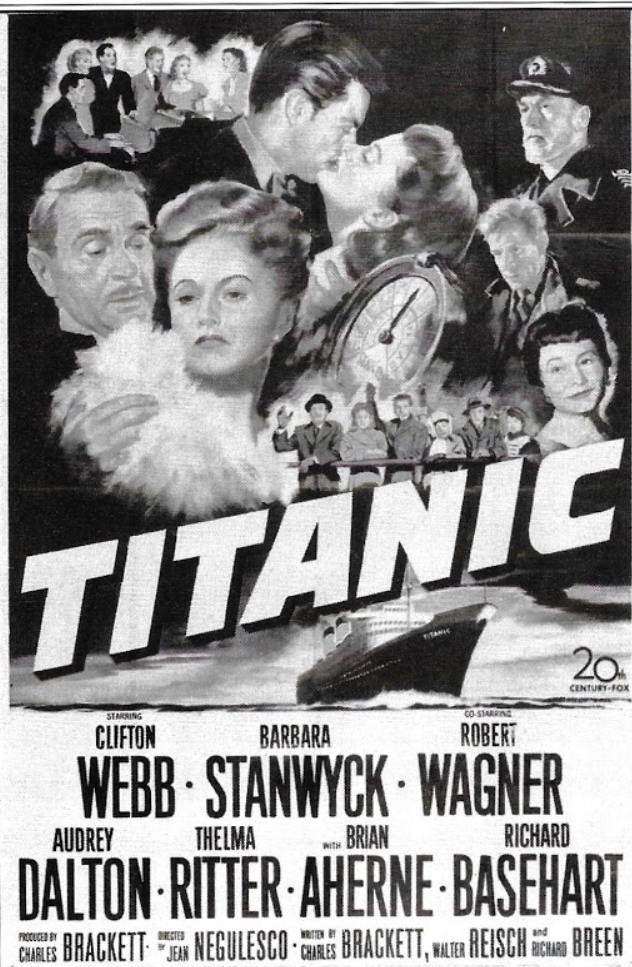
George Rose, among many others, turn in heartfelt—and ultimately heartbreaking—work.

In 1964 came the splashy film version of Meredith Wilson's tuneful Broadway musical *THE UNSINKABLE MOLLY BROWN*, starring Debbie Reynolds whopping it up as Molly, Harve Presnell as Leadville Johnny Brown, and with the mighty Titanic but one of many incidents in the sprawling MGM songfest. The tuneful score included "I Ain't Down Yet" and "Belly Up to the Bar, Boys."

RAISE THE TITANIC (1980) was a very poor film based on a popular book by Clive Cussler, but it was purely speculative, since in 1980 no one had yet found the title character, much less raised it. But the eighties was still an eventful decade: it was the last period in which a good number of the survivors who were adults when the ship went down were still living, and they were all contacted when, finally, in 1985, the Titanic's watery grave was at last located. With the discovery came the certain knowledge that the mighty ship would never see the light of day again . . . at least never in real life, that is.

Broadway and Hollywood saw it differently. For some reason, the nineties saw a sudden renewal of interest in the oft-told tale. Just over 85 years after it was supposed to sail majestically up the Hudson River, *TITANIC* finally made it to New York—on April 23, 1997, when the Peter Stone/Maury Yeston musical, widely predicted

STUPENDOUS! COLOSSAL! TITANIC!



LEFT and RIGHT TOP: poster art for TITANIC (1953) and A NIGHT TO REMEMBER (1958), two earlier film versions of the most famous maritime tragedy. RIGHT: At age 90, Gloria Stuart had to have old-age makeup applied to make her a convincing 101-year-old for the new TITANIC. In fact, she would have had to have old-age makeup applied to make her look a convincing 90!

to be a disaster in the works, opened to favorable reviews, good box office, and a fine collection of Tony Awards—five in all, including one for Best Musical. The show certainly didn't hurt for advance press, although most of it was negative. Among many other difficulties, word had it that the sets wouldn't fit into the Lunt-Fontanne Theatre. The topper came when TITANIC began previews prior to its opening night: at one performance destined to go down in theatrical history, the ship refused to sink!

Still, the big, big, big news of the past year or so has been the 20th Century Fox/Paramount Pictures production of James Cameron's TITANIC, better known (until it opened) as both the Most Expensive Motion Picture Ever Made and the Movie Destined to Sink Two Studios. The price tag: \$200 million, approximately \$192 million more than it cost to build the actual ship. The cast: not a major superstar in sight, with Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet as the romantic leads and the supporting cast including Kathy Bates (as the unsinkable etc. etc.), Billy Zane, Frances Fisher, Bill Paxton, Bernard Hill, Victor Garber, Jonathan Hyde, Eric Braeden, David Warner, Bernard Fox—and, in the touching role of Old Rose (the Winslet character at age 101), Gloria Stuart, the lovely female lead of two of James Whale's most celebrated films: THE OLD DARK HOUSE (1932) and THE INVISIBLE MAN (1933).

TITANIC opened to mostly rave reviews (several comparing its epic scope and love story to 1939's GONE

WITH THE WIND) and record-breaking business. Before that happened, though, there was still one last wave destined to break ahead of the blockbuster: a four-hour TV miniseries starring Peter Gallagher, George C. Scott, Catherine Zeta Jones, Mike Doyle, Eva Marie Saint, Tim Curry, Roger Rees, and Marilu Henner (as etc. etc. etc. Brown). The telefilm included a number of true-life details that James Cameron, for time's sake, would be forced to cut out of his feature, but, like the big-screen spectacular to come, this version concentrated on a fictional love affair—two fictional love affairs, actually—resolved by the untimely submersion of the lovers. The critics couldn't have been more ruthless had they been in Cameron's personal employ, but the film, for all its soap-opera emoting, is not that bad, really, and has been released for Titanic completists on laserdisc (Image, \$49.95).

Every hundred years has its Great Disaster, its Crime of the Century. Down through the decades, the 20th Century has traded one crime for another—the Girl in the Red Velvet Swing for the Leopold/Loeb murder case, the Leopold/Loeb murder case for the Lindbergh kidnapping—till we seem destined to enter the next hundred years with O.J. Simpson at the top of the list. But, for all that followed—the Hindenberg, the Andrea Doria, TWA Flight 800—the Titanic holds her place as the Great Disaster of the 20th Century. In that sense, at least, she will sail on forever . . .

—Richard Valley

Blind Fear!

Sherlock Holmes meets the Invisible Man

Martin Powell knows his stuff. One of the many unrecorded cases of Sherlock Holmes mentioned by his Boswell, Dr. Watson, is that of Mr. James Phillimore, who stepped out of his house one day, decided it might rain, stepped back inside for his umbrella, and vanished forever from the sight of man.

More than one writer has struggled to solve this seemingly unfathomable mystery, but leave it to Powell to make the clever connection: the name James Phillimore was a mere alias, of course, and the disappearing act was perpetrated by none other than The Invisible Man!

H.G. Wells meets Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in the graphic novel *A Case of Blind Fear*, written by Martin Powell, illustrated by Seppo Makinen, and published by Caliber Comics. Powell takes liberties with the "established facts"—for instance, transforming the Jack Griffin of Wells' *The Invisible Man* (1897) to Murray Griffin, so that he may become the faithful orderly who saved Watson's life when he was felled by a Jezail bullet—but he does it skillfully and with his Holmesian heart in the right place.

The cast is a large one, drawn from both Wells and Conan Doyle. In the course of the story, we meet innkeeper Mrs. Hall (the role memorably played by Una O'Connor in the 1933 film *THE INVISIBLE MAN*), Mrs. Hudson, Mycroft Holmes, Irene Adler, Colonel Sebas-

tian Moran, Mary Watson, Professor George Edward Challenger (on a vacation from the 1911 adventure *The Lost World*), Godfrey Norton... even Stamford, the man who first introduced Watson to the World's Greatest Detective! Only Professor James Moriarty, who died at the fangs of Dracula in Powell's previous (and recommended) story *Scarlet in Gaslight*, is missing—for obvious reasons.

In *Scarlet in Gaslight*, Powell combines the dramatis personae of the Canon with the characters of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), often to dazzling effect. Remember, Sherlock Holmes is the man who utterly rejected the notion of the Undead in Conan Doyle's short story "The Sussex Vampire" (1924), so he can't be expected to immediately accept the peculiar notions of Dr. Abraham Van Helsing and the bizarre circumstances of Lucy Westenra's strange illness. So strong is the detective's belief in the purely rational, in fact, that, when he witnesses the King of the Vampires transform himself into a bat—Sherlock Holmes goes mad!

If you're a fan of Sherlock Holmes, Count Dracula, or *The Invisible Man*—and what *Scarlet Streeter* isn't—these lightning-paced graphic novels are right up your alley.

—Richard Valley



NEWS HOUND

Continued from page 14

GHOST (retitled APPARITIONS last Demi Moore sue), Frank Miller's HARD BOILED, Mark Hamill's THE BLACK PEARL, and Art Adams' MONKEYMAN AND O'BRIEN.

Updates Aplenty

George Lucas' next production after completing the STAR WARS prequel in 1999 will reportedly be the long-rumored fourth Indiana Jones movie... George Clooney has withdrawn from the role of Artemus Gordon opposite Will Smith's James West in the feature version of THE WILD, WILD WEST. Kevin Kline is being sought as his replacement, according to the trades... Miramax's MODESTY BLAISE remake will be scripted by Quentin Tarantino and will likely star Natasha Henstridge of SPECIES... Variety reports that Sony Pictures wants the ID4 and GODZILLA team of Dean Devlin and Roland Emmerich to produce a rival James Bond film, and hopes to lure Sean Connery (NEVER SAY NEVER SAY NEVER AGAIN?) back as a somewhat seasoned 007... After a solid year of production, Stanley Kubrick has finally finished

shooting his kinky Warner Bros. thriller EYES WIDE SHUT. Now we'll try to keep our eyes wide open while we wait for him to edit it.

Television Terrors

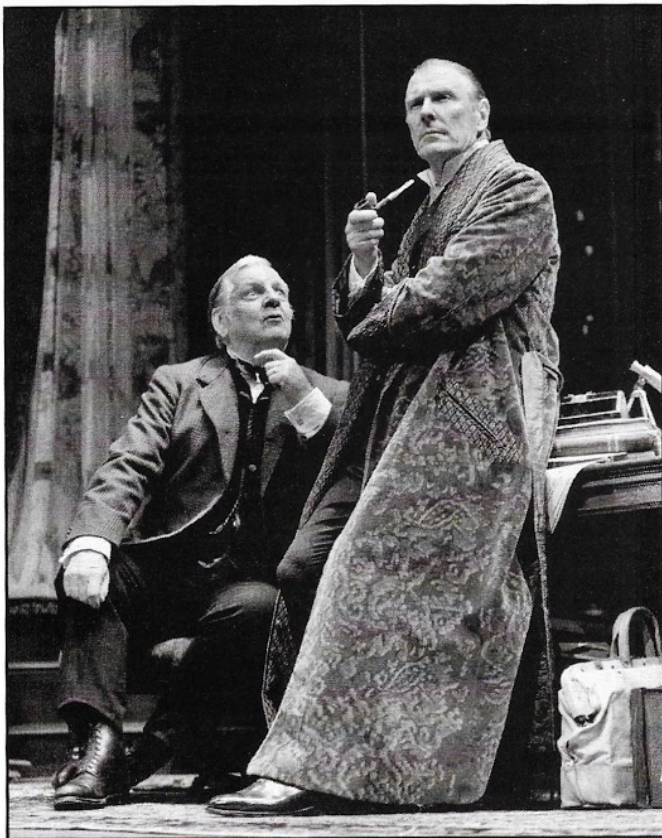
How many genres can be shoehorned into one TV series? Best-selling horror novelist Anne Rice is covering all bets with her first foray into television: RAG AND BONE, which may shortly be starting a mid-season run on NBC. Erstwhile Man of Steel Dean Cain stars as a New Orleans police detective and former priest, whose partner in crimefighting is the ghost of a 1950s gumshoe. If she adds a wacky neighbor who's an E.R. surgeon, it'll run forever!

Sheriff Lucas Buck is back, and The Sci-Fi Channel's got him! The popular genre cable channel is currently rerunning the wonderfully spooky (if ratings poor) series AMERICAN GOTHIC, including four episodes that never aired in the U.S. Also currently rerunning on Sci-Fi are EARTH 2, SPACE: ABOVE AND BEYOND, and SLIDERS. (Watch for newly-produced SLIDERS episodes starting in June.) And set your remotes on stun this coming September, when Cap'n Kirk and crew join the Sci-Fi fam-

ily with uncut telecasts of classic STAR TREK.

MORE TALES OF THE CITY is scheduled to air on Showtime in June. At a January press conference in Pasadena, author Armistead Maupin voiced his sincere hope that the four-and-one-half-hour miniseries, which had been turned down by PBS after they had coproduced and aired the original TALES OF THE CITY, would be followed by dramatizations of the four remaining novels in the TALES series. Said Olympia Dukakis of the many letters she received following the first series: "They all asked the same thing. How could the woman who was in MOONSTRUCK and STEEL MAGNOLIAS have agreed to play a transsexual? For me it was simply a wonderful part. I was thrilled to be able to portray a transsexual as something other than a caricature or a joke." Added Thomas Gibson, who plays the treacherous Beauchamp Day, "It's interesting to think that the first broadcast might have helped some people to relax and let other people be who they are—to realize there is nothing to be afraid of. For every bigot out there, perhaps there was somebody who saw

Continued on page 19



by Richard Valley

Hugh Leonard's *THE MASK OF MORIARTY* is a Sherlockian spoof that actually plays fair with its mystery. The vital clues are all there for the audience to see and hear, and the result is a satisfying mass "Aha!" when the solution is at last revealed in the second act. That the killer is not Professor James Moriarty, the Napoleon of Crime, and that the solution to the crime is given by him and not by Sherlock Holmes, only adds to the madcap Victorian fun.

And the fun is madcap, with Dr. Henry Jekyll's good friend, Mr. Edward Hyde, making a brief cameo appearance at the very start of the mystery; with the astonishing identity of Jack the Ripper being deduced by Holmes and Inspector Lestrade and then quickly dismissed for the good of the Empire; and with a poor, lovelorn woman of the streets waiting in vain for the return of her one, true love: a handsome chap named Dorian Gray.

The plot itself finds the world's first consulting detective investigating the murder of a servant girl on Waterloo Bridge (one of James Joy's many wonderfully atmospheric sets). A young gentleman of quality, named Bunny, finds himself accused of the outrage, and his half-sister, Gwen Mellors, travels to 221B Baker Street for help. Meanwhile, it is revealed that Professor Moriarty did not perish at the Reichenbach Falls (he didn't bounce off a rock as he plummeted toward the water below, but off the seemingly mythical bird called a roc), and that he is seeking a death-dealing device known as the MacGuffin! (No harm in throwing a little Hitchcockian in with the Sherlockian, I guess . . .)

Leonard's play was originally presented at Dublin's Gate Theatre in 1985, with Tom Baker as Holmes. (You'd have to search far and wide for an actor who looks less like Holmes than Baker, but the actor clearly covets the part: he also starred in a 1982 British television production of *THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES*.) It had its American premiere in 1994 at the Williamstown Theatre Festival in Massachusetts and recently concluded a run in San Diego, California.

For its New Jersey debut at the Paper Mill Playhouse on January 7, Paxton Whitehead took on the role of the Great Detective, which he previously played on Broadway in Paul Giovanni's *THE CRUCIFER OF BLOOD* (a 1978 variation of the 1890 novel *The Sign of Four*). Whitehead was a thoroughly excellent Holmes, one given, perhaps, to considerably more witty retorts than the Conan Doyle original, but still well within the boundaries of the Canon. That he managed to keep his Holmes pure was all the more remarkable given the outlandish events surrounding him. These included a mysterious figure in bandages, a crazed hunchbacked assistant (is there any other kind?), a visit from Queen Victoria, and Dr. Watson decked out in drag. (The good doctor is frightfully upset that his gloves don't match his gown.)

Leonard, the author of the justly acclaimed play *DA*, occasionally strives too hard for comedy in *THE MASK OF MORIARTY*, to the point where it might better have been dubbed *DUH*. A running gag in reference to the gentleman thief A.J. Raffles falls flat because the average modern playgoer has never heard of *The Amateur Cracksman* (the title of the E.W. Hornung novel that introduced the character.) The many gay jokes in the play's second half don't resonate properly, because the setup, in which Moriarty voices the scandalous opinion that Holmes and Watson are lovers, is so rushed as to be lost. At times, the play seems nothing more than an extended movie sketch such as those presented on the old *CAROL BURNETT SHOW*. (In fact, it's a snap to recast the play with Harvey Korman and Tim Conway as Holmes and Watson, Burnett as the damsel in distress, and Vicki Lawrence as Queen Victoria.) There is no denying that *THE MASK OF MORIARTY* would have benefited greatly from some judicious cutting, particularly in the first act. Still, its virtues far outweigh its faults.

At the Paper Mill, Tom Lacy (pictured with Whitehead) lent fine support as Watson (never carrying the character, even in this comedy, to the bumbling extremes of Nigel Bruce's characterization), and good work was turned in by Susan Knight as Gwen Mellors, Jon Patrick Walker as Bunny St. John Manders, David Pittu as Lestrade, Amelia White as Queen Victoria (described in the program as "an august personage, who is not to be named"), Paul Fitzgerald as the hunchbacked Herring (whose hair, inevitably, is red), and Julian Gamble in the dual roles of a police constable and a landlord. As Moriarty, Jack Leonard was a pleasant surprise.

A word must be said for the Paper Mill Playhouse itself. New Jersey's State Theater, the Playhouse is celebrating its 60th anniversary season with productions of *THE MASK OF MORIARTY*, Arthur Miller's *DEATH OF A SALESMAN*, and the stunning Stephen Sondheim musical, *FOLLIES*. Even if you were Sherlock Holmes himself, you wouldn't be able to track down a lovelier setting for these plays to be performed than the Paper Mill. Call 973-379-3636 for information.



THE MASK OF MORIARTY

NEWS HOUND

Continued from page 17

something in a slightly different way for the first time." The best comment came from Laura Linney, returning in her role of Mary Ann Singleton. Reminded of the current PBS slogan "If PBS won't do it, who will?", Linney laughed, "Well, the answer is Showtime!" Also in the cast of *MORE TALES OF THE CITY*: Bill (ROCKETEER) Campbell, Colin Ferguson, Barbara Garrick, Paul Hopkins, Whip Hubley, and Swoosie Kurtz. Cameo appearances are made by Edward Asner, Paul Bartel, Brian Bedford, Scott Thompson, Parker Posey, and Dan Butler.

Another tale from Showtime is *THE TALE OF SWEENEY TODD*, a non-musical retelling of the oft-told story of the Demon Barber of Fleet Street. Ben Kingsley stars as Sweeney, the murderous tonsorial artist whose victims provide fillings for the tasty meat pies of good neighbor Mrs. Lovett (played by AB FAB star Joanna Lumley). Campbell Scott, Peter Woodthorpe, and Sean O'Flanagan lend support under the direction of John Schlesinger.

The indefatigable Angela Lansbury (a former Mrs. Lovett in the Stephen Sondheim musical) has finished production in Ireland and France on a new CBS telefilm *MRS. POLLIFAX*, based on Dorothy Gilman's series of mystery novels. Lansbury's fellow Auntie Mame, Rosalind Russell, starred in *MRS. POLLIFAX*, SPY back in 1971... Oliver Stone plans to produce a syndicated live-action series based on the Top Cow Comics title *WITCHBLADE*. Other upcoming TV projects based on comics include *THE CROW* from Polygon TV, the HBO anthology show *DARK HORSE PRESENTS*, and a spanking new *WONDER WOMAN* series for NBC's Fall 1998 season.

Animation fans may find hope in The Disney Channel's announcement of a new series entitled *MOUSEWORKS*, which will feature brand-new cartoon shorts starring classic characters Mickey, Donald, Goofy, et. al. The 22-minute series will debut in January of 1999. The Mouse House also debuts its new basicable channel Toon Disney in April. Now, if the Disney folks would only bring the sleazy theaters back to Times Square....

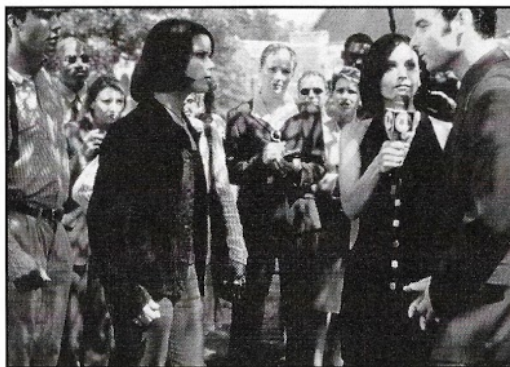
The Home Video Vault

Now lurking at your local video store are Paramount's eerie sci-fi/horror flick *EVENT HORIZON*, Live Entertainment's *WISHMASTER*, and Dimension's direct-to-video sequel *PROPHECY 2*, with Christopher Walken returning as the fallen angel Gabriel. Each are available on VHS for rental and on letterboxed laserdisc for \$39.98. Also on laser: The Roan Group's special letterboxed edition of the 1971 cult vampire favorite *DAUGHTERS OF DARKNESS* (\$49.95), Elite's letterboxed Hammer releases *THE LOST CONTINENT* (\$39.95) and *QUATERMASS AND THE PIT* (a \$49.95

special edition), and Fox Video's first laser release of sixties TV fave *LOST IN SPACE* (three episodes for \$39.98).

The first two episodes of the popular European sci-fi miniseries *LEXX* (televised in the U.S. on Showtime as *TALES FROM A PARALLEL UNIVERSE*) are available for rental from Paramount. Barry Bostwick guest stars in the first episode, "I Worship His Shadow;" Tim Curry plays a villainous hologram in episode two, "Supernova." Watch for the final two installments to materialize later this year.

MGM's secret mission: to reissue the James Bond classics on laser with souped-up THX soundtracks. Already available are *DR. NO*, *GOLDFINGER*, and *THUNDERBALL* for \$39.98 each, and the lesser entry *MOONRAKER* for a lesser \$24.98. More Bond rereleases are coming in '98, but possibly not the long-awaited ultimate CAV editions of *DR. NO*, *FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE*, and *LIVE AND LET DIE* at a hefty \$99.98 each. Even Goldfinger would need to cash in a few bricks to afford them all!



SCREAM goes to college for SCREAM 2

Veteran Bond composer John Barry got an early chance to underscore the villainy of Christopher Lee, long before he brandished a golden gun. The racy 1960 British teen-in-trouble flick *BEAT GIRL* (Kino on Video, \$24.95) features Lee as a slimy strip club owner, Oliver Reed as a sneering punk, and pop star Adam Faith rocking out with The John Barry Seven. Another Kino release in the same vein is the 1959 U.K. musical *EXPRESSO BONGO* (letterboxed, \$24.95), a particular fave of this periodical's publisher, which stars Laurence Harvey and England's own Elvis, Cliff Richard.

If the thought of the new remake of *CARNIVAL OF SOULS* leaves you pale and pasty, pick up Englewood Entertainment's new video release of the 1962 original. It's available for \$19.95 and its original stereo soundtrack has been restored... *PLANETARY TRAVELER* (WinStar, \$19.95) is a spacy 40-minute computer-generated trip across imaginary alien vistas. The Hound recommends watching it with the stereo sound cranked way up while you're wearing one of those TV 3-D glasses, if you can find the ones with one clear lens and one gray lens. Or for headache-free viewing, just press play.

The World Weird Web

Were you a fan of those Aurora monster model kits when you were a kid? Do you pine for the smell of polystyrene? Well, you can revisit that world at Swedish collector Pelle Risell's wonderfully detailed website (www.hobbybooks.se/aurora/). If you prefer your nostalgia more tactile, a company called Polar Lights is reissuing some of the old Aurora model kits in reproductions of the original boxes. Break out the glue and build till you're dizzy. Visit their website (www.polarlights.com) or call 1-800-MANTIS-8 for information... Horror fans can revel in still more nostalgia at Ray Castile's fact- and photo-packed "Gallery of Monster Toys" (<http://members.aol.com/raycastile/page1.htm>).

Fearsome Flotsam

Recapture that sixties spy vibe with Razor and Tie Records' CD reissues of the TV soundtracks to *THE SAINT* and *SECRET AGENT*, featuring that cool Edwin Astley harpsichord... Holy Helen Hayes! *Variety* reports that Warner Bros. is planning to follow Disney onto the Broadway boards with a stage musical based on *BATMAN*... "What are the 39 Stamps?" The U.S. Postal Service will be issuing a stamp this year commemorating (post?) master of suspense Alfred Hitchcock... Some State-side readers may be unaware of the top-notch, long-running BBC Sherlock Holmes radio series starring Clive Merrison as Holmes and Michael Williams as Watson. This year will bring the landmark audiocassette release of adaptations of the Conan Doyle novels *The Valley of Fear*, *A Study in Scarlet*, *The Sign of Four*, and *The Hound of the Baskervilles*—the first time the entire Holmes canon has been portrayed by the same two actors in the lead roles... Meanwhile, over the rainbow, is *Rainbow: A Star-Studded Tribute to Judy Garland* edited by Ethlie Ann Vare. The book features rare interviews with the star and her admirers (including Noel Coward and Garland daughters Liza Minnelli and Lorna Luft), feature stories from the forties, MGM press releases, and essays by Art Buchwald, Shana Alexander, William Goldman, and many others, including *Scarlet Street*'s own Rick McKay!

Gone, but never to be forgotten: director Samuel Fuller; mystery writer Lawrence Sanders (a founder of The Mystery Writers of America); producers William Alland, Saul Chaplin, and Hy Averback; screenwriters Dorothy Kingsley and Mark Patrick Carducci; playwright Murray Burnett (author of *EVERYBODY COMES TO RICK'S*); radio jockey Al "Jazzbo" Collins; singer Sonny Bono; Disney animator Dick Lucas; and actors Don Porter, Isabel Dean, Emil Zitzka, Louise Campbell, David Warbeck, Elizabeth Brooks, and GUYS AND DOLLS star Stubby Kaye, who finally, sadly, took that boat to heaven.



Crimson Chronicles

by Forrest J Ackerman



The Masque of the Red Death: Lon Chaney in the famous masked ball color sequence of the 1925 horror spectacle *THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA*. Chaney, a terrifying figure in a scarlet robe . . .

1997: Forrest J Ackerman wearing the original cape of Erik the Phantom, on a huge stage in Holland, being televised against a great red curtain in the background. I needed Mary Philbin to pinch me, to make me believe it was really me, 6,000 miles from home, 72 years after my eight-year-old self thrilled to *THE PHANTOM* for the first time, now about to see it for the 26th. And 27th.

The occasion: in the little modern/medieval town of Den Bosch, in Holland, birthplace of the fabulous artist of the fantastique, Hieronymous Bosch, a 62-piece orchestra batonned by famous conductor Carl Davis was about to accompany a newly restored print of Chaney's masterpiece, projected on the screen of a beautiful, brand new theater built above what were once the stables of Napoleon's horsemen when he was conquering Holland!

Most fans of the *PHANTOM* have forgotten—or were never aware—that four years after its initial introduction to a gasping world of filmgoers and two years after Al Jolson gave a voice to the silent movies, a sound version of *THE PHANTOM* was released. New scenes were added, it had a musical score, and one word was spoken! Even I have forgotten the word—it was something simple, like "Look!" I only know it was not spoken by Chaney.

I gave a pre-showing speech to a celebrity audience, in which I revealed to the Dutchmen that Lon's first name actually was Leonides. I also revealed the trick of a special effect that may not be known to most of you readers of this column, unless you read about it years ago in my out-of-print volume *Lon of 1,000 Faces!*—where the creator of a famous scene, the late Kenneth Strickfaden, told how he accomplished it.

You know how you gasped when the chandelier crashed down on the unsuspecting, unprotected members of the audience? How bodies were crushed and patrons were writhing? Not a hair was harmed on anyone's head. First, the seats were broken up and scattered about in disarray. Then extras took their places on top of and among them. The chandelier (made of a lightweight substance) was lowered on to



Lon Chaney Shall Not Die!

them, without camera, and then drawn upward! The scene was then run backward and inserted into the reel, so it looked like the chandelier was falling! Are you reeling from the revelation? Dear old Ken Strickfaden lives!

The pre-showing crowd then followed me to a corridor decorated with fabulous Chaneyana: two Scandinavian posters from the time of *THE PHANTOM*, blown-up fotos of Lon from other of his starring

roles—*THE HUNCHBACK*, the armless *UNKNOWN*, the man-ape of the lost *BLIND BARGAIN*.

Speaking of being lost, I was devastated to learn while in Holland that several months ago the original nitrate negative of *A BLIND BARGAIN* . . . exploded! In an MGM vault! It couldn't have happened to some inconsequential, mundane movie, no—it had to be the most sought after Chaney title after *LONDON AFTER MIDNIGHT*.

The piece de resistance of the occasion was the unveiling of the Phantom Cape. I stood beside the Director of the Museum as, before newspaper reporters and a TV crew, he pulled the ribbon that caused the concealing covering to fall from around the glass container protecting the Cape. It was a moment to remember.

With the recent surfacing of A. Merritt's *SEVEN FOOTPRINTS TO SATAN*, only about 15 lost imagi-movies are left: *LONDON*, Lon's *PARIS WHILE IT SLEEPS*, *THE WIZARD*, *HIGH TREASON* (1929's exciting vision of 1940/50), *THE YOUNG DIANA* (Marion Davies immortality), *OUR HEAVENLY BODIES* (a tour of the solar system and the end of the world), *IT'S GREAT TO BE ALIVE (WHEN YOU'RE THE LAST MAN ON EARTH)*, with Gloria Stuart), John Agar's *HAND OF DEATH*, *THE MONKEY'S PAW*, *MYSTERY OF LIFE* (dinosaurs and the end of the world), *THE SKY SPLITTER* (the silent faster-than-light *STELLAR EXPRESS*), *NIGHT LIFE OF THE GODS* (Thorne Smith; Greek statues coming to life, ribaldly), *HELLEVISION* (move over, *PLAN 9!*), *LIFE WITHOUT SOUL* (Frankenstein!), and *ONE GLORIOUS DAY* (first film I ever saw, in 1922 when I was five and a half). At least I saw nine of the 15 of them but I'm still dreaming that, in the 19 years I hopefully have left (to hit 100), I'll see 'em all again—and six for the first time. And live to write about the experiences in *THE CRIMSON CHRONICLES!*



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SCREEN...



and Screen AGAIN!



Scarlet Street's Laser Review

THE CLAIRVOYANT
Image Entertainment
Side One CLV, Side Two CAV
\$39.98

Claude Rains is a third-rate vaudevillian whose act as "Maximus the King of the Mind Readers" is so hopeless he can barely pay the rent. That is, until his predictions begin to come true . . .

The plot has the makings of a whimsical morality play à la *THE MAN WHO COULD WORK MIRACLES* (1936), but this 1934 release from England's Gainsborough studios serves its premise as meat-and-potatoes melodrama. Though British films of the period were notoriously provincial (Hitchcock's were among the rare exceptions), *THE CLAIRVOYANT* seemed to be aiming for a wider market. In fact, were it not for the English cast, it would have little trouble passing itself off as a Hollywood movie.

It's an ideal vehicle for Rains, who was enjoying his short-lived stint as a leading man before settling down as Hollywood's most reliable character actor. He gets the full star treatment here; even the main titles feature dramatic closeups of the actor in action. Rains doesn't disappoint, bringing his usual intensity to the role of a hardworking show biz hack who happily cashes in on his new-found gifts before fully realizing his dreadful powers of life and death. Few actors could match Rains in conveying a full range of emotions by a mere look, but his performance is not lacking in theatrical fireworks when required. (A scene in which he frantically warns off an army of miners from a dangerous tunnel has the show-stopping aplomb Rains demonstrated in 1939's *MR. SMITH GOES TO WASHINGTON*.)

Unfortunately, some of the film's cleverness is spent early on. The script skit-

tishly veers toward soap opera when it's revealed that Rains' powers are triggered by an attractive society girl (Jane Baxter), sending his wife (Fay Wray) into a tiresome pout. The upside of this is that it gives Wray a chance to do some real acting, something she was rarely required to do in her many horror movies. For the most part, the film keeps the viewer engaged, mainly by cleverly injecting tension even in such minor scenes as Rains haggling over his fee or Wray being locked out of the theater during the crucial moment of his act. There's some jaunty, nicely-stylized editing and the climactic mine disaster scene gives this modest production a hint of lavishness.

The print used in Image's transfer shows its age with minor contrast problems and some occasionally noticeable background noise. Hopefully this release will put a spotlight on this unjustly neglected film, although it is more likely to be consigned to the bargain bin before too long. The film was also released as *THE EVIL MIND*.

—Michael Brunas

MIRAGE/THE LIST OF ADRIAN MESSENGER
MCA/Universal
Four Sides CLV
\$69.95

MIRAGE is a 1965 drama often described as a Hitchcockian-styled mystery. Entertaining as it is, however, the film never quite reaches the emotional depths of a typical Hitchcock classic. But it is perhaps more philosophical, in its own way.

Gregory Peck stars as an apparent amnesia victim whose life has become a series of disconnected images. His search for answers leads him down a twisted path of red herrings and fresh

corpses. Peck, on realizing that he truly has no past if he cannot remember it, eventually fears for his own future.

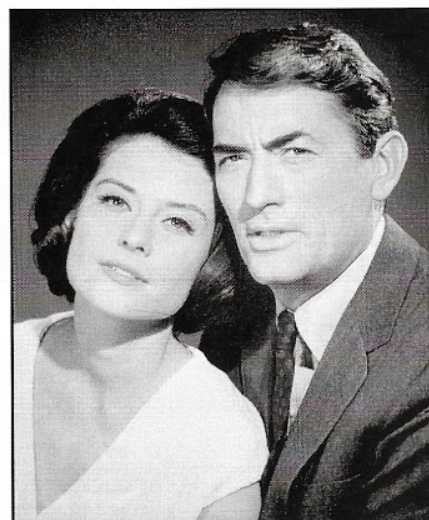
An existential concept, perhaps, but *MIRAGE* presents the material in conventional thriller terms. There are amusingly quirky supporting performances from Walter Matthau as a hangdog private eye, and George Kennedy and Jack Weston as laconic thugs. Diane Baker's putative femme fatale, however, seems more of a cipher than a flesh and blood character. She periodically returns to the film's narrative simply to advance Peck along the trail of sorting out his past.

Intriguingly, *MIRAGE* was directed by Edward Dmytryk. It was based on 1952's *Fallen Angel* by Howard Fast, writing under a pseudonym. Both men suffered during the infamous Hollywood Communist witch hunts. Dmytryk, in particular, spent a year in prison before undertaking a self-imposed exile to Europe. When he returned to America in 1951, he finally presented testimonial evidence that indicted his former colleagues.

Gregory Peck's climactic revelation reflects Edward Dmytryk's ambivalent resolution of his own past. The director was able to move forward with his life, but at considerable cost to others. Peck's cathartic recollection symbolically links members of two trusted American institutions, science and the military, to a covert scheme of dubious commercial purposes. He does thwart this enterprise, but at what cost? Will he be perceived as a hero, or simply a whistleblower?

MIRAGE is presented in the 1:85-1 aspect ratio, which offers attractive images of the filmed-on-location New York settings. But the source material, while unblemished, does seem a bit too dark. The contrast displays minor inconsistencies of lighting. The film is followed by a badly-faded trailer preview that attempts to sell the film as a standard whodunit.

The second feature of this double laserdisc is John Huston's 1963 puzzler *THE LIST OF ADRIAN MESSENGER*.



Ostensibly, the film is a workaday mystery about a conniving killer. His plan involves dispatching a number of men standing between him and a hefty British estate.

Kirk Douglas is revealed as the murderer early on, removing the film from the whodunit category. Rather, it becomes a whydunit, as George C. Scott subtly portrays a retired British Intelligence officer. Scott's m.o. is to uncover a common denominator that will reveal the motive behind the series of camouflaged deaths.

THE LIST OF ADRIAN MESSENGER cleverly transforms itself into a game of cat-and-mouse when Douglas ingratiates himself into the good graces of the gentry. Scott and Douglas perform a lethal *pas de deux* as they lay traps for one another. John Huston's use of fox hunts, not present in the original novel, becomes a metaphor for their struggle.

Though a fastidiously performed thriller, THE LIST OF ADRIAN MESSENGER is justly remembered for its William Castle brand of ballyhoo. Tony Curtis, Robert Mitchum, Burt Lancaster, and Frank Sinatra contribute cameos while garbed in heavy makeup. Albeit unmasked when the film has concluded, the accompanying liner notes have already revealed the real secret behind this gimmick. Like the plot itself, all is not what it appears to be. . . .

"Talk to Kirk Douglas!" screamed the initial theatrical engagement newspaper ads. A local phone number was listed in a small box within the ad. When phoned, however, the exchange simply played a recording of Kirk Douglas stumping for the film. Just another bit of ballyhoo associated with the picture.

THE LIST OF ADRIAN MESSENGER is presented close to the 1:76-1 aspect ratio. The source material is unblemished and sharply focused, offering good contrast between black and white. The disc ends with a trailer pushing the participation of the celebrity guest stars to center stage.

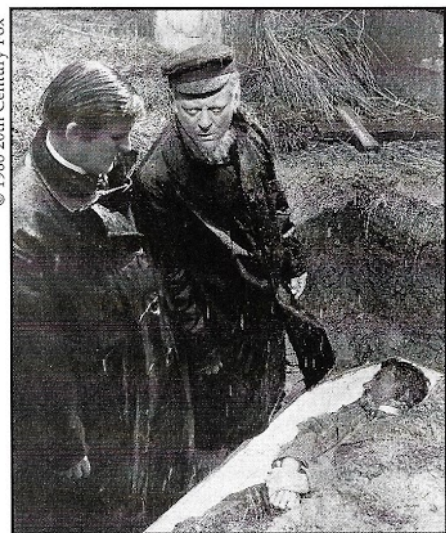
—John F. Black

THE REPTILE
Elite Entertainment
Two Sides CLV
\$39.95

Rudyard Kipling taught us, in "The Mark Of the Beast," to go not afoul of that best left alone. Hammer's THE REPTILE substitutes a reptile woman for Kipling's leopard man, but the lesson remains the same.

Charles Spaulding (David Baron), visiting the manor of learned theologian Dr. Franklyn (Noel Willman), is almost immediately attacked by an unseen assailant. The attack results in foaming at the mouth, skin discoloration, fang marks, and death. Charles' brother, Captain Harry Spaulding (Ray Barret) and Harry's wife, Valerie (Jennifer Daniel), inherit Charles' cottage in Cornwall, and travel there to set up housekeep-

ing. Upon their arrival, the Spauldings find the cottage ransacked and the village living under a cloud of fear. Seeking answers, Spaulding encounters distrust from all save innkeeper Tom Baily (Michael Ripper). The puzzle is furthered by the silent appearances of Franklyn's "servant" Malay (Marne Maitland). Malay holds an inexplicable



control over both Franklyn and his serpentine beautiful daughter Anna (Jacqueline Pearce).

One scene treats us to Anna playing a raga (classical composition) on the sitar, a North Indian stringed musical instrument. Granted, she begins her performance with what is characteristically the closing movement of a raga and it is a bit painful to see her hitting those high notes at the top of the instrument's neck . . . but Hammer's heart was in the right place. Ragas are meant to convey specific emotions, and the emotion produced by this "performance" is sufficient to cause Franklyn to snatch the sitar from Anna's hands and smash it against the fireplace in a fit of rage. And the cause of this rage? Again we hearken back to Kipling. Franklyn has indeed gone afoul of that best left alone, resulting in a curse that subjugates him to Malay and places Anna in a peril that allows only one outcome.

THE REPTILE is classic Hammer, populated with colorful villagers, crusty old salts, the odd "madman" (Mad Peter, wonderfully played by John Laurie), and a strong woman (Daniel). Ripper's innkeeper stands out as a sincere, down-to-earth and decidedly non-stereotypical character who deftly leads Barret's Captain Spaulding to delve into unimaginable areas. Barret is reminiscent of a slightly stuffy Peter Cushing, but lacks the authority that makes you take Cushing very seriously, indeed.

The two-sided CLV disc is up to Elite's high standards, characterized by crisp images beautifully letterboxed (here at about 1.85:1) and clean monaural sound. While a bit too much color saturation

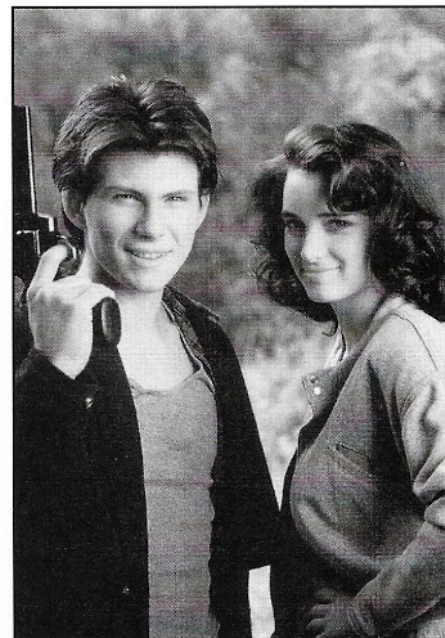
and a strong magenta cast mark some scenes, a small increase in green and a smaller decrease in color saturation resulted in an overall excellent image. The side change is ideally placed at a natural cut. The disc is not close-captioned and offers little in terms of extras: a theatrical trailer for THE REPTILE and two combo TV spots for THE REPTILE and RASPUTIN—THE MAD MONK. It does, however, offer what Elite has become famous for: unedited and stunning widescreen transfers of some very desirable films.

—Michael Spampinato

HEATHERS
Lumivision
Two Sides CLV
\$49.95

Any discussion of teen films of the eighties will inevitably lead to John Hughes, often considered a guru with such films as THE BREAKFAST CLUB and SIXTEEN CANDLES to his credit. While Hughes made a somewhat admirable contribution to the genre, HEATHERS, the 1988 cult classic, is the overlooked epitome of what being a teenager in the eighties was really all about.

Veronica Sawyer (Winona Ryder) has fallen in with the most popular clique of Westerburg High—three girls named Heather (Shannen Doherty, Kim Walker, and Lisanne Falk). In reality, Veronica despises them, and secretly yearns to be rid of their cruel and superficial presence. Enter Jason Dean (Christian Slater), the new kid at Westerburg, who turns



out to be the Azrael of Veronica's secret hopes. With his psychotic guidance, Veronica initially gets what she wishes for—but things soon change. Each surviving Heather gets bumped one notch up the popularity ladder, replacing the one who just died. The dead Heathers

achieve more popularity in death than they ever enjoyed in life. In the end, Jason plans on ridding the school of more than just a few popular dragon-bitches.

One particularly humorous subplot involves Slater and Ryder killing off two high school football jocks and faking a suicide note explaining that repressed homosexual feelings for one another was the catalyst for their Romeo and Juliet routine. As they prepare the night before, Slater produces a shopping bag filled with "homosexual artifacts" to leave at the crime scene. Among these are an issue of a gay men's magazine, a postcard of Joan Crawford, and the smoking gun: mineral water. When Ryder expresses confusion over this item's significance, Slater responds dryly, "This is Ohio. If you don't have a brewskie in your hand, you might as well be wearing a dress." This is but one example of screenwriter Daniel Waters' brilliant ability of juxtaposing stereotypes with the same character in a single scene, in this case Slater's views on rednecks and homosexuals. The ultimate bite here, though, is that through using these stereotypes against each other, the trick works: everyone believes the suicide note by virtue of the "evidence" found by the bodies. But, even Waters was a bit reluctant about this scene initially. As he explains on the audio commentary track, "I was always worried that this would be offensive to a gay audience, but gay audiences worship this film." A bit overstated? Perhaps, but Waters' point is nonetheless well taken.

Waters incorporates a stinging wit that is simultaneously surreal, horrifying, and hilarious. The cast displays a chemistry that is almost uncanny in actors so young. Ryder and Slater shine, both on their own and together. Ryder turned 16 during the filming, and her talents at that young age were just as remarkable as those she exhibits today.

Doherty, Walker, and Falk play the self-indulgent "Diet Cokeheads" to tyrannical perfection. Other notable performances come from Renee Estevez as Ryder's childhood friend Betty, and Glen Shadix (Oltho in *BEETLEJUICE*, also costarring Ryder) as a priest.

The special edition Lumivision laserdisc is a very nice package. The new digital film transfer is letterboxed at 1.85:1, presenting a generously proportioned and uncluttered screen image. The colors and lighting utilized by director Michael Lehmann are fresh and vibrant. Purists will also enjoy the original mono film soundtrack, which appears on the digital audio channel.

Two audio tracks are incorporated here. Analog track one features an animated, entertaining commentary by Waters, Lehmann, and producer Denise Di Novi. Significant are the in-depth discussions of various script changes, shooting styles, locales, motifs, cut scenes, and the original ending, which New World Pictures demanded be altered. David Newman's music score and the film's sound effects are isolated on the second track.

The disc concludes with the original theatrical trailer, three different television ads (two of which perfectly feature Oingo Boingo songs "Only A Lad" and "Dead Or Alive" as underscoring), and a final promotional trailer for the film.

Still the overlooked teen film of the eighties, this package finally gives *HEATHERS* the royal treatment it so richly deserves.

—Brooke Perry

ATLANTIS/THE POWER
MGM/UA
Four Sides CLV
\$59.95

A diverse double bill of George Pal film projects is presented by MGM/UA in a two-disc set.

ATLANTIS, THE LOST CONTINENT (1960) is a fantasy film in the Harryhausen mythology mode. Young Demetrios (Anthony Hall) and his father, who sounds exactly like Paul Frees, rescue a beautiful young maiden (Joyce Taylor) from the sea. She claims to be Princess Antillia of Atlantis, which is across the great ocean beyond the Pillars of Hercules, and demands that these filthy peasants take her home. Demetrios declines. He may be a filthy peasant, but he's no idiot; he knows he'll fall off the end of the world if he sails beyond the Pillars of Hercules. Finally, he tells her he'll give it a try, but, he declares in a riveting monotone, if "before the space of one moon" they don't find Atlantis, they will return to Greece. "But wait, there's more!" he exclaims in one of the laziest pieces of dialogue ever committed to film. "When we return, you will become my dutiful wife forever more."

Once past this challenging scene, things become more bearable. They are picked up by a fish-shaped submarine from Atlantis and young Demetrios looks forward to seeing more of the wonders of science. What he gets, instead, is hauled off to the slave-labor camp, the victim of the conniving Zaren (John Dall, whose acting style contrasted so jarringly with Olivier in *SPARTACUS*, but who fits in quite well here) and his wicked Astrologer (Frank DeKova, wearing a feathered headdress that just may have gotten him his job as Chief Wild Eagle in later years). Antillia's father, the king, who sounds just like Paul Frees, is dying, and Zaren is scheming to take power. Antillia's only sympathizer is the high priest/scientist, Azor, played by Ed Platt.

Meanwhile, Demetrios does indeed see some miracles of science. He is introduced to strange crystals that generate power, light, and heat. In fact, he is forced to make little crystals out of big ones with a hammer and chisel. He is introduced to genetic engineering and a cell full of rubber-headed animal men, and is almost transformed into a pig by a nasty slavedriver with a tabletop science kit. During his enslavement, Demetrios befriends an old captive from his own homeland, who sounds just like Paul Frees.

The astrologer has foretold the doom of Atlantis, and we all know it has to happen by the end of the movie, so Demetrios tries to undermine Zaren's plans until the island blows. And blow it does! The sinking of Atlantis is spectacular, crammed with collapsing buildings, volcanic eruptions, stock footage of Rome burning, natural disasters, people dying by the thousands—rilly kewl stuff. But, as we've seen from Demetrios' travails, the whole population is corrupt and worship a false god, so they deserve it.

The story is as pointless as any special effects fest past or present, and any acting that may accidentally happen along the way serves only to move us



toward those effects. But they're eye-pleasing effects to be sure; George Pal wouldn't let ya down.

And just in case you missed Paul Frees' voice, he narrates the epilogue.

THE POWER (1967) is a pretty nifty little paranormal thriller about a researcher who is stalked by a mysterious ubermensch with deadly psychic powers. A decent premise with a weakish script, the film is made watchable by a good cast, including George Hamilton, Suzanne Pleshette, Yvonne DeCarlo, Nehemiah Persoff, Earl Holliman, and Michael Rennie. You don't need the psychic network to predict that most of the cast will be dead by the end of the film, and it's true!

Hamilton, looking paler in his youth, portrays our protagonist, Jim Tanner (ironic, no?), who works with a labful of eccentric scientists investigating human pain tolerance for the space program. Reporting their progress to a program official (Rennie), the most eccentric among them (Arthur O'Connell) blathers madly about someone on the staff who scored so highly on a mental ability test that they may be dangerous to humanity—a quantum leap in evolution!

Of course, the old loony is almost immediately murdered, in a fascinating little scene of mind control and telekinesis. (Miklos Rozsa's distinctive Eastern-influenced score eerily accentuates the film's sparingly and effectively used scenes of psychic attacks.)

Tanner finds himself under personal attack after his colleague's "accidental" death. He is set up as a suspect and discredited to his employers, so, in the very best tradition of the innocent, framed good guy, he lams outta there. The film drags a bit while Hamilton is on the run and trying to discover which of his co-workers may be the deadly superman—or woman; even Tanner's girlfriend, played by sweet, blue-eyed Pleshette is not above suspicion.

The scene which most reminds us that Tanner and company torture people for a living is a clumsy attempt at a "hip" sixties party with generic movie "rock" music and a bevy of go-go dancers in silly fashions, including someone billed as "Miss Beverly Hills." This scene, with its gyrating and zooming handheld cinematography, seems to be more a parody of the party segment of Rowan and Martin's LAUGH-IN than part of a serious movie.

A much more exciting torture scene occurs when someone tries to waylay Tanner by leaving him in the desert in the middle of an Air Force target range. It may be at this point in Hamilton's career that the tan started to get serious.

Predictably, anyone who is a suspect or who may be able to help Tanner is killed, and when all the little Indians are gone and the last suspect steps out of the shadows to reveal himself, we're treated to a properly tense—and quite literal—battle of wills, with a satisfying

twist and a nice smattering of stop-motion effects.

I noticed a bit of film damage or grit once during THE POWER; other than that both discs feature excellent transfers in extended play with digital sound. THE POWER is presented in 2.35:1 letterbox format, but ATLANTIS, the more visual of the two, is not widescreen. Both films are followed by original theatrical trailers.

While both films are worth a watch, neither is nearly as good as WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE (1951), WAR OF THE WORLDS (1953), THE TIME MACHINE (1960), or even CONQUEST OF SPACE (1955), Pal's best genre films. But for an entertaining evening with a bag of popcorn and a loved one for support, they'll do.

—John E. Payne

THE RELIC
Pioneer
Two Sides CLV
\$39.95

Peter Hyams teams up with producer Gale Anne Hurd to present a suspenseful tale of evolutionary biology gone berserk. A Chicago anthropologist researching ancient tribal cultures in Brazil drinks a weird brew during a ceremony and unknowingly becomes transformed into a supposed mythical creature called The Kothoga. When he steals his way back to America via cargo ship and reacquaints himself with his old surroundings at Chicago's Museum of Natural History, a series of gruesome murders occur that perplex a tough detective (Tom Sizemore) and the museum's resident evolutionary biologist (Penelope Ann Miller).

Quite frankly, the script, based on the novel by Douglas Preston and Lincoln Child, is a little weak and confusing. But Hyams, always a trooper, manages to upgrade THE RELIC to a surprisingly good thriller through casting, editing, lighting, and special effects. Stan Winston's makeup designs are not featured prominently until the finale, but they are superb as usual. Taking his cue from the undoubtedly Lovecraft-inspired name Kothoga, Winston creates a truly horrifying hybrid of human, insect, and reptile.

Miller (recently seen as Margo Lane in THE SHADOW) turns in a sincere performance as Dr. Margo Green, whose scientific worldview is shattered by the prospect of myth becoming reality. Sizemore, a veteran of roles involving crime and police work, is effective as the superstitious Detective D'Agosta. The cast also includes Linda Hunt as Ann Cuthbert, the museum director, and James Whitmore as the invalid Dr. Frock, a specialist in mythology and superstition. Whitmore is particularly delightful to watch, though his onscreen time is comparatively brief.

Paramount's single-platter laserdisc is presented in a 2.35:1 aspect ratio. While

this enhances the claustrophobia of the scenes that take place in the museum's labyrinthine basement, it leaves a little to be desired in the aerial exterior shots. Here the framing simply becomes too tight, and most of the frenetic activity with the police helicopters and SWAT crews gets lost because it can't be seen very well, or for very long.

The film's lighting really comes out clear on the transfer. Hyams intentionally shot most of the scenes using only available sources (the emergency floodlights inside the museum, the policemen's flashlights, computer monitors, etc). The full frame videocassette fluctuates between being too murky and too grainy during these scenes. The disc,



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manufactured by Pioneer, delivers a picture that is bright and sharp, greatly accentuating the *chiaroscuro* effect that Hyams was looking to achieve.

—Brooke Perry

THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES
MGM/UA
Two Sides CLV
\$39.98

Atmosphere, intrigue, mystery, romance, the supernatural, and the world's most renowned detective—on the list of works gladdening equally the hearts of videophile and bibliophile, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES must reside somewhere in the stratosphere.

Hammer's 1959 offering begins with an accurate and visually stunning retelling of the Baskerville Legend, a fable originating with the death of Sir Hugo Baskerville by a murderous, spectral hound. This opening lends considerable credence to the aphorism that "one picture is worth a thousand words," for the telling of Sir Hugo's evil proclivities is



transformed into a decidedly disturbing sequence that makes Doyle's original narrative almost polite in comparison.

With this promising premise established, we cut to 221B Baker Street and a moment of disappointment. Dr. Mortimer (Francis DeWolff) has come to Baker Street soliciting Sherlock Holmes' (Peter Cushing) protection for Baskerville Hall's newest heir, Sir Henry (Christopher Lee). Cushing, even in his most evil roles, projects charisma and a refined yet energetic personality. Yet here he portrays a swaggering, boorish, and most unattractive Holmes, one who mercilessly denigrates Mortimer. The doctor departs, with Holmes' assurance of assistance. Just as we fear that Cushing has been completely miscast, he pulls a complete turnabout, transforming himself into a vibrant and very satisfying Holmes whose posturing pretence, he explains to Watson (Andre Morell), was designed to penetrate Mortimer's obtuseness. (Morell's Watson is a man of some intelligence, providing a calm, mature counterpoint to the indefatigable detective.)

Holmes, Watson, and Mortimer meet Sir Henry in a London hotel. Christopher Lee's Sir Henry is solid yet unremarkable, due not to a lack of prowess on Lee's part, but to the nature of the role. Holmes sends Watson to Baskerville Hall as protector, promising to join him later in the week. His warning to his client: "The powers of evil can take many forms. Remember that, Sir Henry, when you're at Baskerville Hall. Do as the legend tells and avoid the moor when the forces of darkness are exalted."

Dartmoor makes for prime Hammer, with elegant interior sets and sweeping outdoor scenes. The moors, at once desolate and beautiful, are shown to great advantage, while the Hound that roams them, though seen infrequently and always at night, is a truly huge, fearsome thing, whose fangs would do a werewolf proud.

The approximately 86-minute film spans two sides of a CLV disc. The clean mono audio offers the full soundtrack on the digital tracks and isolated music/

sound effects on the analog tracks. The video, letterboxed at 1.66:1, is clean and sharp with overall excellent color, although some of the bright outdoor scenes are just the a bit washed out. A surprisingly black-and-white trailer completes the package.

While not faithful to the original text in several areas (the relationship of the Stapletons being the most glaring), Hammer's *HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES* represents a very solid

entry in a long line of film adaptations.

—Michael Spampinato

KISS ME DEADLY

MGM/UA

Both Sides CLV

\$39.98

The darkest of film noirs, Robert Aldrich's *KISS ME DEADLY* (1955) was released when the maverick director was honing his style by reworking conventional Hollywood formulas. Aldrich came out slugging, turning his characteristic cynicism to the war film (1956's *ATTACK*), the Western (1954's *VERA CRUZ*), and the tearjerker (1956's *AUTUMN LEAVES*). He scored his knock-out punch by transforming a Mickey Spillane potboiler into a simmering Cold War parable. Aldrich's film was so fervent a depiction of American decadence that it was openly embraced by France's New Wave apostles, while many State-side critics (*The New York Times* among them) wouldn't stoop to review it. Today, *KISS ME DEADLY*'s reputation as a masterpiece is practically unchallenged.

Aldrich nails down the gritty pulp-novel imagery from the first frame. A frazzled blonde (an almost unrecognizable Cloris Leachman) wearing only a trenchcoat flags down Spillane's gumshoe hero, Mike Hammer, on a dark, lonely highway. They are soon overtaken by a gang headed by a dapper, mythology-quoting sadist (Albert Dekker). Hammer is beaten into a coma as



the girl is tortured to death before revealing the information the thugs are seeking. The Feds take an inordinate in-

terest in the case, tipping off the private eye that the dead woman is linked to a stolen object which both the government and her killers are in desperate competition to obtain. Hammer proves to be more bloodhound than detective, doggedly tracking down leads, questioning an oddball assortment of opera singers, fight promoters, and Mafiosos, all of whom have only the vaguest connection to the case. When the mystery box is finally opened by the last surviving member of the gang, it turns out to be a true Atomic Age "treasure."

The script raises more questions than it answers, making *KISS ME DEADLY*, in the final analysis, something of a bust as a mystery. But as filmmaking, it's a dazzler. Aldrich keeps the mood off-kilter from the bizarre credit roll (which, of course, runs backwards) to the quirky, breathless performances of the femme leads. Unlike John Huston's *THE MALT-SE FALCON*, which couched the Sam Spade character in moral ambivalence, Aldrich barely conceals his contempt for his hero. Hammer shares Spade's bully-boy arrogance, gleefully shaking down hapless suspects and crushing the hand of an autopsy surgeon in a desk drawer. In the opening scene, Leachman's character sizes Hammer up harshly and accurately; moments later, a straight-faced lawman, apparently not getting his own joke, pegs Hammer as a "bedroom dick." The effect of all this is somewhat lost on Ralph Meeker. As Hammer, the actor can't quite shake off his boyish likability and intelligence, garnering more sympathy than his creators intended.

Owners of the previously released MGM/UA disc of *KISS ME DEADLY* may think twice before purchasing this newly-remastered letterbox edition, but they shouldn't. Not only does this disc include the theatrical trailer, it has both versions of the film's ending! The standard version, apparently approved by Aldrich, was cut so ambiguously that it suggests Hammer and his Girl Friday perish in a climactic holocaust. The restored ending is less existential, perhaps, but it's far more thrilling.

—Michael Brunas

THE TOMB OF LIGEIA

Image Entertainment

Side One CLV, Side Two CAV

\$39.98

Vincent Price stars as Verden Fell, the archetypal Edgar Allan Poe hero who shuts himself off from the world beneath a pair of dark spectacles, consumed by the memory of his long-dead wife, Ligeia. But when he finds himself attracted to Lady Rowena, the restless spirit of Ligeia begins to stir...

The premise is groaningly familiar, yet *THE TOMB OF LIGEIA*, the last in Roger Corman's Poe cycle, may very well be the best. Corman's relocation of the series to England, beginning with *THE MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH* (1964), gave it a fresh start, providing him

with actors far more comfortable in period roles. Likewise, the departure of writer Richard Matheson, whose leaden touch for comedy was sadly apparent when the series turned to parody, made it necessary for the director to turn to fresh talent.

Not that Robert Towne's script strays far from the familiar trappings—suggestions of premature burials, black cats skulking down hidden passageways, family retainers vigilantly harboring their master's dark secrets, and a resolution in the form of a blazing homestead were all series staples. What saves *LIGEIA* is Towne's resistance toward turning the material into yet another Vincent Price vehicle by injecting a potent strain of Gothic romance. The film can almost be described as *REBECCA* by way of Poe—but in place of duMaurier's wispy narrator, Towne creates a fiery, independent heroine in Rowena. The character is not only well up to fighting the specters of her husband's past, but is dimensional enough to create a believable romantic situation. The part required someone more substantial than the usual blank-faced AIP ingenue, and Elizabeth Shepherd, filling the bill admirably, proved she could hold her own with Price's flamboyant screen presence.

The shift in emphasis cleared the cobwebs from Corman's style. Breaking away from the oppressive, dimly lit interiors of the rest of the series, Corman set as much of the action as possible in the natural sunlight of the English countryside. The film shows the director's skill at its most assured, providing AIP with as polished a production as ever fell under its banner. The scene in which Rowena unexpectedly breaks in on Verden,



who, mistaking her for Ligeia, begins to strangle her, is as well-staged as anything Corman has ever done. The director uses the camera to good advantage, but never does so self-consciously, even working the old silent movie device, the iris, seamlessly into the narrative.

Luckily, Image has located a near-flawless British print for this handsome letterboxed presentation. The audio track features running commentary by Elizabeth Shepherd, which was taped by David Del Valle, using home equipment, during a local television airing of the film in the seventies. The sonic shortcomings are apparent (the tape was ed-

ited for commercial breaks), but Shepherd is an engaging personality. De Valle does an excellent job of drawing out her reminiscences and insights, and helps clear up some of the plot confusion in the final reel.

—Michael Brunas

**THE COMEDY OF TERRORS/
DIE, MONSTER, DIE!**
Image Entertainment
Four Sides CLV
\$59.95

The opening of Jacques Tourneur's 1964 spoof *THE COMEDY OF TERRORS* feature speeded-up images. This frantic pace, coupled with Les Baxter's deliberately anachronistic score, telegraphs the rollicking tone to come.

Following the comparative sobriety of *HOUSE OF USHER* (1960), *PIT AND THE PENDULUM* (1961), and *PREMATURE BURIAL* (1962), Roger Corman decided to inject some humor into "The Black Cat"/"Cask of Amontillado" episode of *TALES OF TERROR* (1962). Receiving some critical acclaim, Corman employed more of the same device for *THE RAVEN* (1963). American International decided to create a "horror" film of almost completely comic content. For this project, they tabbed the French cult director Tourneur.

A jambalaya was thusly concocted by scriptwriter Richard Matheson, lifting the Vincent Price/Joyce Jameson/Peter Lorre domestic triangle from "The Black Cat" and peppering it with a Shakespeare-spouting landlord, a daffy Boris Karloff performance, and a feline of undetermined gender.

Vincent Price portrays a man who has unhappily married into the funeral business. His heavy imbibing is simply a symptom of a malaise that inhibits him from ever performing a good day's work. His father-in-law Boris Karloff has retreated into senility, while his wife Joyce Jameson is a woefully untalented opera singer.

With the aid of his sad sack associate, Peter Lorre, Price occasionally digs up business by "creating" new stiff to be buried. When his fanatical landlord John F. Black (Basil Rathbone) demands the entire last year's rent, Price sees a golden opportunity to "kill two birds with one pillow."

Lacking the special effects of *THE RAVEN*, *THE COMEDY OF TERRORS* is largely a film of verbal flourishes, arched eyebrows, and physical pratfalls. In the hands of a lesser cast, this material could have become monotonous. But Price, Lorre, Rathbone, and Karloff interact with the unrestrained joy of farceurs. Their ensemble perfection is matched by the lesser-known Joyce Jameson, who strongly holds her own with the quartet of horror thespians. She manages to be as sympathetic as she is funny, and is never eclipsed by her veteran costars. Jameson's showstopping funeral dirge, "He is not dead, but

sleeping," ironically reflects the landlord Black's refusal to stay dead for very long.

THE COMEDY OF TERRORS is presented in the 2:35-1 aspect ratio, which handsomely displays the meticulously designed sets. Musty bric-a-brac is everywhere to be seen. The print does evidence a few white speckles occasionally, but is otherwise in good shape. The letterboxed image permits the viewer to observe the full scope of the actors' reaction shots and double takes, important underscoring for such ensemble playing.

Daniel Haller designed many memorable sets for American International, especially for the Roger Corman series of Edgar Allan Poe adaptations. But that in itself does not suggest that he was qualified to assume the director's chair.

Haller's comparatively brief directorial career encompassed two H.P. Lovecraft adaptations, *DIE, MONSTER, DIE!* (1965) and *THE DUNWICH HORROR* (1970). Apparently, he felt an affinity for Lovecraft's work. Equally appar-

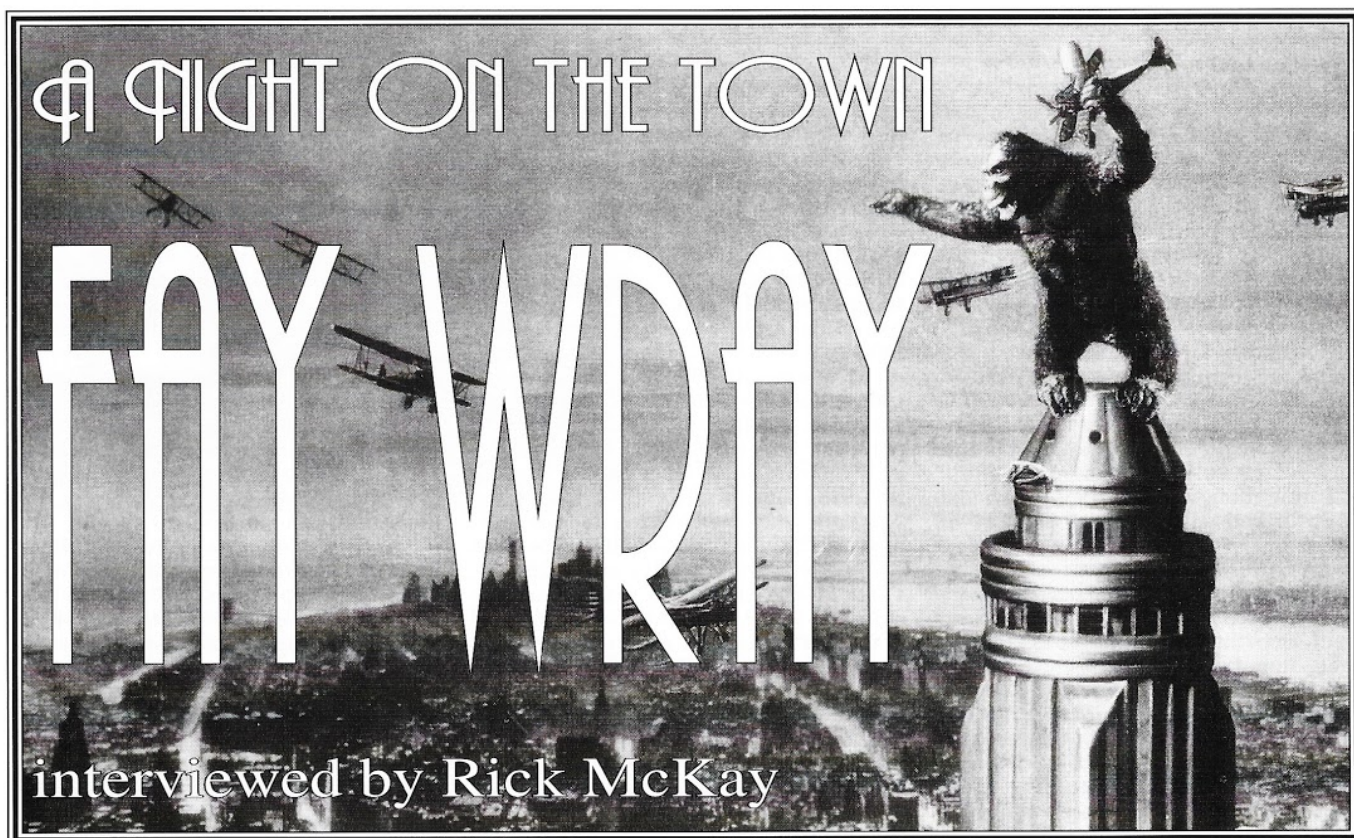


ently, he was misguided in pursuing that relationship.

DIE, MONSTER, DIE! is based on Lovecraft's short story "The Colour Out of Space." The story delineates the degradation of a New England community by a fallen meteorite. The citizens fear that their natural resources, and indeed their very futures, have been permanently corrupted by the unfathomable intrusion from beyond their world.

Haller manages to suggest a portion of this ambience in his film. But his dependence on horror clichés, "borrowed" from the Edgar Allan Poe series, renders the atmosphere more ludicrous than terrifying. Haller employs a swirling kaleidoscope of colors beneath the opening credits. Whenever "hero" Nick Adams mentions "The Witley Place," villagers freeze up on cue. When Adams first enters Witley's (Boris Karloff) house, he gets the obligatory tour of stairwell portraits depicting crazed ancestors. The basement walls are conveniently decorated with sinister paintings, which hint at undefined "cult" activity. Haller knows this territory well, having designed the Vincent Price/Poe epics. But he seems incapable of adding anything fresh or innovative with which to raise the stakes.

Continued on page 70



Fay Wray just might be the one name that almost any living person on the planet would recognize. Young or old, film fan or not—it doesn't matter. She was immortalized on a soundstage at RKO when a tall, hairy ape reached down and picked her up. She made a total of 80 films and became even more famous in the fifties and sixties when some of her greatest pictures—*KING KONG* (1933), *THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME* (1932), *DOCTOR X* (1932), and *THE MYSTERY OF THE WAX MUSEUM* (1933)—were rediscovered by an entire new generation, thanks to the then new medium of television.

In the seventies, there was *THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW* with the famous lyric "What ever happened to Fay Wray?" What ever happened to her? A lot. There is a night devoted to her on April 29 at the Smithsonian Institute, when they will fete her and show a new print of *KING KONG* in a series that includes evenings devoted to Kenneth Branagh, George Lucas, Liv Ullmann, Derek Jacobi, and Roger Ebert. I had also been very impressed recently by a story in *The New York Times* about her going before Congress to speak about writers and residuals in Hollywood. One congressman said, "The last time we had someone from Hollywood here it was Melanie Griffith and she fell asleep. It is nice to have a young starlet as beautiful and charming as you who actually stays awake!" There was a picture of Ms. Wray, looking vibrantly alive and still beautiful. I knew that this was someone I wanted to know and I was delighted when Richard Valley asked me

to interview her for *Scarlet Street: The Magazine of Mystery and Horror*.

Reaching her was not easy. After many inquiries, I was happy to find that a good friend had worked for years for her son, Robert Riskin Jr., who owns and runs the legendary LA music store McCabes. E-mails between her son and me transpired. I was beginning to wonder if the interview would ever happen. Then, one day when I was busy writing, I heard my answering machine pick up a call that I was sure at first was a joke:

"Hello?! I am calling by way of my son, Bob . . . my name is Fay and he said that I should call you. Hello?"

Needless to say, I picked up. She invited me to see her speak at the Museum of Modern Art, at a tribute to her late husband, screenwriter Robert Riskin, who had written *PLATINUM BLONDE* (1931), *IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT* (1934), *MR. DEEDS GOES TO TOWN* (1936), *LOST HORIZON* (1937), *MR. SMITH GOES TO WASHINGTON* (1939), *MEET JOHN DOE* (1941), and many more.

When I first saw Fay Wray walk onto the stage at MOMA, I was surprised. It was impossible to believe that this woman had starred in the silent film *THE WEDDING MARCH* (1928). It seemed chronologically impossible. She was beautiful, elegant, witty, and completely won the audience over. At the end of the tribute, I waited till most people were gone and introduced myself. She was delightful and promised we'd do the interview soon. I was still glowing as I went up the escalator, and hardly noticed there was a crowd wait-

ing behind a rope for the museum's next event. When I reached the top, I realized that the first person behind the rope was former New York mayor Ed Koch. He looked at me and said, "What's going on down there? Why are we all waiting?" I couldn't think of anything to say, except, "Fay Wray is down there!" "Fay Wray?" he asked. "You mean the Fay Wray?" "The one and only," I told him. "Just wait here and she'll be coming up any second. You might miss her if you go down as she comes up." "Well, fine, then," he said. "Her I have to meet!"

The rope was taken away and the crowd began going down. Soon the whole group was down the escalator, except for the former mayor. "You sure she's coming up?" he asked. "Oh, yes, any second," I reassured him.

Just then, I saw the elevator door open 10 yards away. A small crowd was hustling her out the door. "Miss Wray!" I called her name, but saw a sedan door opening. As I got to the street, I saw a hand wave. "Goodbye, Rick McKay—see you soon!" As the car pulled away, I saw Mayor Koch huff and start down the escalator. "Maybe next time," he called with a roll of the eyes and a smile. I hoped the interview would go better than my introductions.

I soon had an appointment set up with Ms. Wray for dinner and the theater. I had recently interviewed the composer of the Broadway show *TITANIC* and the press agent had asked me to see the show. I couldn't think of a better date to see it with, especially since rumor had it that Ms. Wray had been offered the role played by Gloria Stuart in the new

film version. As I got out of the taxi at her Manhattan high-rise, I was very impressed by the liveried staff. "Miss Wray is waiting for you. We will bring you right up, sir." She answered the door looking chic and elegant—all in black, with tasteful gold jewelry. It had been 65 years since KONG and she was still a beautiful woman, red bow lips and a thick cap of silver hair surrounding the same face from all those films. Time had been more than kind to her.

As we sat down, she put me to ease instantly by getting me a drink and starting the conversation . . .

Fay Wray: I have to show you what came today. Isn't this lovely? A book signed to me by Eudora Welty. Well, I think that is the most marvelous gift.

Scarlet Street: She's a great writer. She always says, "Write what you know."

FW: Yes, but I heard Sinclair Lewis say to his son, "Don't write what you know—you'll run out of material!" (Laughs) It always fascinated me.

SS: Well, I don't think there's ever any danger of you running out of material. You've led such an eventful life. Wasn't Sinclair Lewis one of the many writers who fell in love with you?

FW: Well, he said so, but I don't know why. He didn't get even the slightest response from me. But his letters were lovely. And the poems he wrote me were lovely.

SS: Did you save them?

FW: Oh, he asked me to! I used some of them in my book.

SS: Well, writers always found you—or you found them. It's natural that you're writing.

FW: Oh, I think so. I hope I'm doing it well, but I don't even care, because I just want to do what I care about doing. I suppose it is acceptable, and if it's not that's fine, because I have expressed myself. My children like what I've been doing.

SS: A lot of people like what you're doing. Your first book, Fay Wray: On the Other Hand, was well received.

FW: Yes, it was well received.

SS: And it's a perfect title, considering your most famous acting role was spent sitting in a giant gorilla's hand! Of course, our readers are curious about your horror and adventure movies.

FW: Well, that's all right. I made them; I have to admit to it!

SS: Oh, but they're legendary films.

FW: KING KONG is, and I think it's wonderful that there is a movie that is so enduring and that I'm a part of it. I like that feeling, now. It used to be that I was a little, "Oh, dear, an animal picture! Oh, my!"

SS: It's one of the most famous motion pictures ever made.

FW: I think it is. And it's known around the world. When my daughter and her husband went to China many years ago—they were one of the first groups to go there—she was introduced as the daughter of the woman from KING KONG. Oh, my! They got a good, strong reaction!

SS: I hate to say it, but if we're going to make it to the theater, we'd better get going.

FW: Is it cold? I'm wearing this down coat. My body is not used to New York cold yet. I'm usually in my Los Angeles place, now!

As we reached the lobby, the doorman said it would be very hard to get a cab, as we were at peak pre-theater rush hour. I kicked myself for not planning better. "I could go to the avenue and try and get you a cab," he volunteered. We made small talk as we waited. "Don't worry, I know one is coming right now; I can feel it," Fay kept saying. Soon the doorman ran back. "This is the best I could do," he said optimistically. There stood the longest, whitest stretch limousine that I had ever seen! It looked like it should house six couples on the way to their junior prom. I apologized to Ms. Wray, told the doorman we were fine, and opened the door for her. Being on my best behavior, I told her not to bother scooting over, that I would get in on the other side. But, as I ran around the back of the limousine I saw it take off without me! I had lost Fay Wray! I had a movie legend in my keeping for 10 minutes and I had already lost her! I ran down the street after her and caught the superstretch just as it was turning at the light. I pulled my door open just in time to hear the diminutive star calling, "Stop, stop!" to a driver half a block ahead in the driver's seat. We were off. Luckily, she found it very funny and soon we were both laughing.

SS: I hope you'll forgive me, but since we are going to TITANIC, I can't resist asking you if it's true that you were offered the new film version.

FW: Well, I was slightly tempted, but I am really glad that I didn't. I've written

a play, THE MEADOWLARK, that was produced this past summer, and that was so much more rewarding than anything else could have been. It had the best cast and production it's ever had. It deals with a time in my life when my family, because of the Depression, came south from Canada. Well, we ended up in a town called Lark, which is 20 miles out of Salt Lake City. The housing was so inadequate that we had a real struggle. It was good for us, I suppose. Those kinds of times produce qualities that make us better for having had them. My parents were not getting along. My mother was quite intolerant of friendships being developed. She wanted us to feel we were above everyone in the town. She really did tell us that we were related to Chief Justice John Marshall, and that may have been true. I never did bother to find out. For the purposes of the play, it was perfect to be able to use that and the stresses and strains that there were. At the end of the play, the mother realizes the terrible things she had done.

SS: Well, that must be better than therapy for you.

FW: Therapy? I don't know.

SS: But, you can resolve those issues and learn to understand them by reliving them in the play.

FW: I don't think I will ever understand that behavior. Or ever understand intolerance. Ever!

We arrived at the Lunt-Fontanne Theater and saw TITANIC. After the performance, I suggested that we have dinner at the Paramount Hotel several doors down. The hotel lobby is designed by Phillip Stark in a whimsical fashion and the grand staircase ascending to the restaurant is radically raked and appears to be tilted. "Are you sure we're not still on the Titanic?" Fay asked, not missing a beat.

As we ordered drinks, the young waitress kept staring at her. "Are you . . . an actress?" asked the young girl. "Well, I used to be," said the coquettish star. "I'm a writer now." After we placed our order, I excused myself for a moment. When I returned, I found a slew of young waiters and waitresses all sitting on the floor at my date's feet. They had figured out who she was and wanted to know all about her movies. Their young eyes were shining. This is the town where Woody Allen said you can always get service in a restaurant by calling, "Oh, Actor!"

"I'm an actress and a writer, too," our waitress was telling Fay. "I saw THE CLAIRVOYANT," a young waiter was telling her. "It just came out on laserdisc. You are so incredible!" Fay paid attention to each one and signed a few autographs. They reluctantly scattered back to their duties.

FW: I was living at the Dorchester when we made THE CLAIRVOY-





Fay Wray on board the *Venture* with Frank Reicher, Robert Armstrong, and Bruce Cabot; in the clutches of a pterodactyl; and with King Kong on display in New York. Watching it all from below: KONG's young lovers.



ANT. I was thinking only yesterday how delightful it was. The man who designed the clothes never arrived before roses came. Roses came first. Wasn't that lovely? Wasn't that beautiful? These things don't happen very much today, I think.

SS: *If you went back to work, they would.*

FW: (Laughs) Well, that is a charming thing to say. But *THE CLAIRVOYANT* had an interesting story, a very interesting story—and that is what is required, I think, in that genre. Just scary for scary's sake is not worth anything. But, there was a fascinating story, where Claude Rains was a mindreader, and to his surprise he anticipated the winner of the derby. But, he didn't know he was going to do that and he got a little lost, didn't he? It changed his life.

SS: *He didn't know his own powers.*

FW: No, but he believed that he had more than he had. There was a conflict in him. Good actor, very good.

SS: *Claude Rains? What was he like?*

FW: Oh, he was very focused, very focused—and he wanted to be taller! I always think of that in connection with him. I noticed that his heels were always quite a bit higher than anyone else's on the set!

SS: *Higher than yours?*

FW: Well, equal to mine, I suppose—but with more foundation than I had! (Laughs) *THE CLAIRVOYANT* was a good film because of the story value, I think. And I liked working with Claude Rains; I had great admiration for him. He was a really serious actor. No fooling around and no nonsense! Speaking of Claude Rains, did you ever read that thing about *CASABLANCA*? Did you read what Groucho Marx said? There's a brilliant letter he wrote to Warner Brothers about the use of the word "*Casablanca*." He was making a picture with his brothers called *A NIGHT IN CASABLANCA* and Warners protested the use of the word "*Casablanca*" in the title. Well, Groucho wrote them back and said he had no idea that anyone could own a town like that! And he said, "What about the word 'brothers?' Why, we were brothers long before you were broth-

ers!" (Laughs) It's brilliant! I want to save it for Julius Epstein, the man who wrote the original *CASABLANCA*. If he hasn't seen it, he will enjoy it so much!

SS: *That's who you recently went to Washington with, right?*

FW: Yes, my daughter Vickie, and her husband David Rintels and Epstein and I went to Washington to ask for residual payment for the people who had written films in the early, early days, people who never got any residuals on tapes or anything at all. Now the copyright has been extended 20 years, but prior to that they paid no attention to these people, and some of them really need help. It was appropriate to have someone who had written *CASABLANCA*—and it didn't hurt to have me, because I was married to some very great writers.

SS: *Yes, you were, and you played opposite some great leading men. There's one in particular who certainly didn't need lifts . . .*

FW: Oh, that! Well, that is a lovely film, I think—the one that begins with *KING* and ends with *KONG*. (Laughs) It has been so enduring. You know, at first, when I saw it, I thought, "Oh, but there's too much screaming in this film!" I was a little unhappy about that. I didn't realize it had the impact that it had until, oh, maybe 20 years later.

SS: *How did you create the famous Fay Wray scream?*

FW: When we were making *KONG*, I went into the sound room and made an aria of horror sounds. I was in charge of it; there was no one there to listen to me. I was totally in charge of what I wanted to do.

SS: *No one directed you in your screams?*

FW: Not at all. I directed me entirely! The attitude about *KING KONG* was like that. The producers liked me and trusted me, and more than one scene was only one take, because I'd plan ahead what I thought would be appropriate for that scene—so one take was enough. I enjoyed that part of it, and I really enjoyed working with Merian Cooper. I had great respect for him. He was a wonderfully absentminded man. I remember a time we had been at a dinner party for the man who invented Technicolor

[Herbert T. Kalmus]. When we were waiting in the hallway to depart, Cooper's wife, Dorothy, asked Merian if he would go upstairs and get her warm winter coat. So, he went up and came back with a fur coat. The only problem was that Dorothy didn't own a fur coat! Now that's pretty absentminded, I'd say—but he was very talented. He was very enthusiastic about whatever came before him to do. He was a good friend to the aviators he had worked with in the first world war. There was a very unified feeling about them that I admired a lot. He had been in prison in Russia. He was shot down over Poland! He went to join the Kosciuszko Squadron, if you know what that means. I don't know really what it means, exactly, but it was important! He was shot down and sent to prison. He escaped with a lady who subsequently went with him to Persia—it used to be Persia—and they did a beautiful film called *GRASS*.

SS: *Was he friendly with your first husband, John Monk Saunders?*

FW: Yes. They both had the same literary attorney in New York and were both interested in flight. John Monk Saunders wrote *WINGS*, which won the first Academy Award for Best Picture.

SS: *You got a letter just the other day about KING KONG, didn't you?*

FW: Oh, that's an interesting letter! It said that "a sign of maturity is when you find—after seeing *KING KONG* many, many times—that you are more interested in the early part of it before we even meet Kong." He said, "I like to look at that over and over again." He was complimenting me. He wouldn't have written it otherwise.

SS: *The first third of the picture is really quite powerful. Weren't KING KONG and THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME filmed on the same sets?*

FW: Well, it wasn't really a set—it was a jungle! (Laughs)

SS: *Were they filmed back to back?*

FW: No, they were filmed at the same time, because *KING KONG* had to have a lot of animation and that took a lot of time to do. So, while they were getting the animation completed, it was pos-



sible to do other films. **THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME** was one. That was a very interesting story. Weird story. But, it had value because it took an unusual approach. The other ones I did—**DOCTOR X** and **THE MYSTERY OF THE WAX MUSEUM** . . .

SS: You're not too crazy about them, are you? But **KING KONG**'s success was international. We tend to assume that **KING KONG** has existed forever, like some kind of folklore.

FW: You're right. It has become a myth. But, that was Merian Cooper's concept. Cooper just made it up!

SS: **KING KONG** was originally edited for television. Among the scenes that were cut was a famous one in which Kong peeled off your clothes. Was that scene filmed entirely with you?

FW: Well, they said so, but they probably put a few scenes in because they thought it would be exciting. Actually, the camera was never overhead at any time. It was always a side view of me. Subsequently, after the picture was released, I saw some scenes shot from above and my clothes being pulled. I think that was added later.

SS: Do you think it was a stunt double and they wanted to spice it up?

FW: Yes, I think so. Merian Cooper never would have done that and he never would have asked me to do that.

SS: So when you went to the original theatrical release, those scenes weren't in it?

FW: Well, there were shots of Kong pulling at my clothes, but only in horizontal and never from above. Never from above.

SS: Which movie did you find more of an acting challenge: **KING KONG** or **THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME**?

FW: Well, neither one was a challenge. **KING KONG** was difficult only because of the hours we had to put in. At that time, there was no protection for actors about time or anything. We worked straight through for 22 hours once on **KONG**. It was a wearying experience,

because it was mechanics, really, as much as anything that we were dealing with. The technicality was transparency to transparency from the rear, and then rephotographing me in the foreground on the same level with that screen—so I couldn't really see what was happening at all! It had to be done many, many times to confirm that it was okay. So we worked for 22 hours!

SS: Incredible!

FW: And that was supposed to be a test. Now, my friend Merian Cooper was a wonderful person, but he used that test and you were not supposed to do that. The test was used in the picture.

SS: So, you weren't aware when you shot it that you were shooting the final product?

FW: No, not really. It was supposed to be the test to send to New York to get the okay to put up the money for the film. Well, they saw it and liked it and they sent some money. But this was a time when Hollywood was in desperate straits. RKO was almost bankrupt—so **KING KONG** really saved the studio. When I look back, I'm glad that it helped save the studio. Who can say, "You mustn't use this because it's a test!" There were no rules, no rules at all.

SS: Today the union would stop it.

FW: But, that was a very dreary experience. Tiresome. I liked Merian Cooper well enough. He had this wonderful, boyish enthusiasm, and I was keen about his style and his friendship and what he stood for as a human being.

SS: He obviously cared about you, too.

FW: And he did care, he did care. I had been in a film of his before, a silent

film called **FOUR FEATHERS**. Richard Arlen, Bill Powell . . . it was rather a good film. Merian Cooper liked me well enough to do **KING KONG**, and then **THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME**. He came to New York after we'd done **FOUR FEATHERS**, because he didn't like the studio's treatment of that film. He was angry and he came with the intention to make Pan Am a successful airline. Juan Tripp was a friend of his. Good name for an airline man, huh? "Juan Tripp after another?" (Laughs) Merian knew some rich people and someone named Burden, who was wealthy and related to the Whitneys. Well, that man had brought back two enormous dragon-size lizards and had given them to the Bronx Zoo. Merian wanted to put them on the Chrysler Building and make a movie about them, but then decided that he'd use the Empire State Building. At the time, I was doing a play in New York with Cary Grant. When I got back to LA, Merian called me into the studio and said, "You are going to have the tallest, darkest leading man in town!" Well, I thought he was talking about Cary Grant! I thought, "He cares enough about me that he's been checking on me and knows that Cary Grant is coming to Hollywood!"

SS: Little did you know! So, **KING KONG** was originally going to be a lizard?

FW: Well, he certainly might have been! But, I wouldn't have been in it, then, would I?

SS: Sure you would, but your leading man would have been just a bit . . .

FW: Slimy! (Laughs) I was ready to take whatever Merian Cooper wanted me to do. He was like a big

boy who had enthusiasms.

Why, he and his partner, Ernest Schoedsack, went up in the planes and shot down **Kong**. They were the ones



who did the scenes in the planes! With those shining virtues, he couldn't make a mistake. And sure enough, he didn't make many mistakes with KING KONG, did he?

SS: Not at all. Did Merian Cooper ever talk to you about the inspiration for KONG?

FW: Well, it started with those giant lizards, and then he realized it was not as practical or picturesque as a gorilla. But Willis O'Brien, the man who had done the dinosaurs for THE LOST WORLD, was available and it came very quickly to Merian that O'Brien would be effective. Willis O'Brien is the man who really created King Kong. He came on the set one day and stood in a doorway—if there is such a thing as a doorway on a set—and I thought it would be nice to talk to him, but I never got to!

SS: But, you had your hands full—or, rather, you were a handful! Did you keep in touch with Merian Cooper over the years?

FW: Yes. Of course, there was THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME, but that was really made by his partner. He was hardly ever on the set.

SS: Cooper never recreated the success of KONG, did he?

FW: No, but he was thinking of doing something terrific. We went one day to the airfield to say goodbye to a mutual friend. Cooper was leaning on a fence with me and he said, "You know, I have an idea that is much bigger than KONG. You thought KONG was big? Well, it's nothing compared with the idea I have now." I wish he had told me all about it, but he didn't. He never did that film that he was dreaming of. . . .

SS: Joel McCrea was actually supposed to be your leading man for both KING KONG and THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME.

FW: Oh, I don't know about that. He was certainly my leading man for THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME, but I don't know how those decisions were made.

SS: Who did you have most fun working with: Joel McCrea or Bruce Cabot?

FW: Oh, well, I didn't really know Bruce Cabot at all! He was not a personality you could even exchange with or talk to; he was just there when he was needed, then he was off. Sometimes they had to go looking for him!

SS: And Joel McCrea?

FW: He was a sweet human being, a very dear human being. Gentle, gentle kind of person. We had a social relationship because we both went frequently to the home of Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks. . . .

SS: Pickfair.

FW: . . . which was always a nice experience. But, Joel—always at the stroke of midnight he went home! He just disciplined himself that way, I guess.

SS: He wasn't too involved in the glamour and show-business side of Hollywood?

FW: No, I don't think so. He was not an "actor's actor," shall we say. I don't think he would ever have wanted to be in the theater, for instance. But, he had an easy charm about him. I did one other picture with him later—THE RICHEST GIRL IN THE WORLD, I think it was called. He was always just a sweet guy.

SS: What about Leslie Banks?

FW: Oh, Leslie Banks, who played Count Zaroff in THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME, was an astonishingly interesting actor, a very distinguished English actor. He looked like he'd had a stroke. He had something wrong with one eye and it gave him a really scary expression. It didn't hurt that picture at all! (Laughs) It was Zaroff's idea to send the people out and then send the hounds after them.

SS: Did you get to know him at all?

FW: It seemed to me that we worked pretty fast and didn't get a chance, really, to get to know the people we were working with. Sometimes you worked long enough that you got acquainted with the company, sometimes you didn't. . . .

SS: Besides, you had a husband and a home life.

FW: Well, not much of a life. No time!

SS: One of your costars is rarely discussed: Noble Johnson, who was the native chief on Skull Island and Zaroff's loyal servant in THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME.

FW: You know, I never had a conversation with him! I know that he was a very well regarded figure in those films, but not to my consciousness when we were doing them.

SS: Robert Armstrong was also in both films, as Carl Denham in KONG and your drunken brother who gets murdered in THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME.

FW: I had a drunken brother in THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME? Nobody told me! (Laughs) He was a very proper, straightforward stylist in acting. I used to go to lunch with him and his wife and liked them very much. He was always, always, always a good actor, but I didn't even know he was supposed to be drunk in that movie! All I know is that the concept was interesting, because the writer had chosen to make people the hunted ones. I thought that was an interesting turn of events, but the rest didn't seem to register.

SS: Well, Armstrong's drunkenness wasn't really vital to your own performance.

FW: No, that's true. I just had to slush through the undergrowth. . . . (Laughs)

SS: You made three films opposite Lionel Atwill. He was pretty notorious in Hollywood for his wild parties. Were you ever invited to one?

FW: Lionel Atwill? Wild parties? I am simply amazed! Oh, no! (Laughs) He was married to the ex-wife of Douglas MacArthur. I never heard of any wild parties, but how would I know? If there were any, I certainly wasn't invited to them!

SS: What was he like?

FW: Well, he was a . . . profile.

SS: A profile?

FW: He knew just how to position his head to get the right angles! He was very conscious of his contour. And that was the most significant thing about Lionel Atwill, I thought. I don't mean to put him down, but it seemed to be what he had and what he used!

SS: Your most famous scene with him was the unmasking in THE MYSTERY OF THE WAX MUSEUM.

FW: That was a pretty horrible moment for me and I'll tell you why. There was a mask that was made for him that was gruesome—a wax mask. I was supposed to hit him and the covering of the mask was supposed to fall away—but it only fell partly away, not all away. And what I'd done was so repulsive that I froze, which would be the natural thing to do. You wouldn't try to get more of the mask off; at least, I don't think so. But, the director, Michael Curtiz, for the sake of his point of view, wanted to see all of Lionel Atwill's face beneath the mask as soon as possible. He wanted me to keep hitting till everything was opened up and that awful, awful face was revealed. But, I had just stopped, because that was the natural thing to do. Well, they had another mask and another awful face, so I just shut my eyes and hit it so it could be photographed. But, I didn't appreciate the director's lack of understanding about what happens to you when a moment like that occurs. Michael Curtiz was not—well, he did CASABLANCA, which was a very good movie—but I didn't appreciate him at all as a director. I thought he was more like a part of the camera. He didn't have any warmth whatsoever. He was offended because people ate when lunch was called, even on location!

Continued on page 37





by Mark Clark

DANGEROUS GAMES

You have run as far as your legs will carry you. Huddled in the darkness near a fallen tree, you gasp for breath. Your lungs are full of fire. Your calves rebel, and seize with cramps. Your whole body cries out for rest, for sleep, but you dare not pause for long. Somewhere, slinking though the inky night as silent as a jungle cat, is a madman with a high-powered rifle. And the hunter will not relent until he has added your skull to the gruesome souvenirs in his macabre trophy room.

Welcome to the nightmare world of Richard Connell, author of the timeless adventure tale, "The Most Dangerous Game," about a sadistic sportsman who hunts people instead of animals. The short story won the O. Henry Memorial Award when it was published in 1924. Since then, it's been anthologized, adapted, revised and ripped off countless times. Even your bashful narrator contributed a rewrite. In my version, penned at the tender age of 11, the hunter is foiled when (in E.C. Comics style) his prey turns out to be—a werewolf!

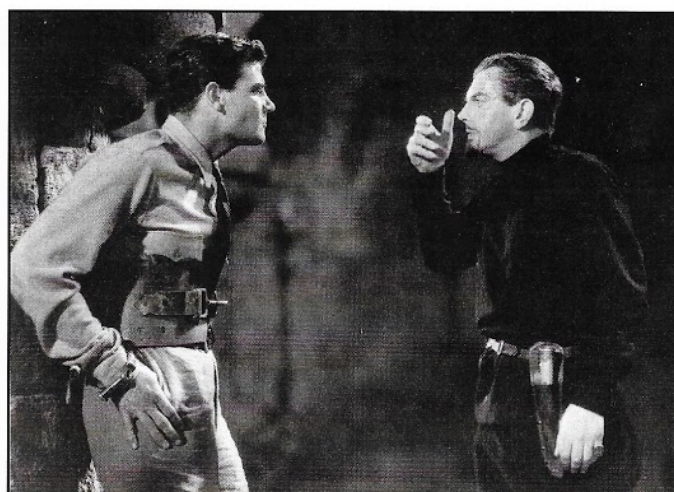
Film versions of the story range from the sublime (THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME/1932) to the ridiculous (SLAVE GIRLS FROM BEYOND INFINITY/1988), and deteriorate as they progress, like a photocopy of a photocopy of a photocopy.

Connell's short story has been reprinted in nearly as many textbooks as adventure anthologies. *The Norton Introduction to Literature*, second edition, offers "The Most Dangerous Game" as a study in suspense and "an excellent example of its kind." The story appears in this volume alongside such revered tales as Ernest Hemingway's "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" and Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery."

When "The Most Dangerous Game" opens, Sanger Rainsford, a globe-trotting author and big-game hunter, is returning from a South American safari on board his yacht. He extols the virtues of his favorite sport to his traveling companions, then strolls out on deck to take in the sea air. While standing at the rail, he drops his pipe, reaches over the side to try to catch it and tumbles overboard. Unable to overtake his speeding yacht, Rainsford swims to a nearby island. There, he discovers an aging castle and its master, General Zaroff, a wealthy Russian expatriate. At first, Zaroff seems warm and gracious. He offers his guest food, drink, and rest. He flatters Rainsford with praise for his guest's books, which Zaroff has read and admired. When the conversation turns to hunting, the general boasts that he has imported to his tiny island "the most dangerous game," a new quarry more exciting than any he has pursued before. Rainsford quickly deduces Zaroff's "new" prey is in fact human beings, whom Zaroff hunts with the aid of a brutish Cossack henchman, Ivan, and a kennel of hounds. The general is eager to match his skills against those of his famous guest. Rainsford, the hunter, becomes Rainsford, the hunted.

Zaroff supplies him with hunting clothes, food, and a knife. If Rainsford can elude him for three nights, Zaroff pledges to set the author free. The balance of the story details the tense cat-and-mouse game between Zaroff and Rainsford. On the first night, the general discovers his quarry helpless in a tree, but lets Rainsford escape. Connell writes:

Why had the general smiled? Why had he turned back? Rainsford did not want to believe what his



LEFT: Leslie Banks gives one of horror's great performances as Count Zaroff, the crazed Russian who hunts **THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME** (1932). **RIGHT:** Zaroff is at a loss to explain why he has trussed up his house guest (Joel McCrea) in a one-piece lace foundation garment.

reason told him was true . . . The general was saving him for another day's sport . . . It was then that Rainsford knew the full meaning of terror.

The next night, Rainsford lays traps for his adversary, killing one of Zaroff's dogs in a Burmese tiger pit and wounding the general in a "Malay man-catcher." But Zaroff presses on, tirelessly. Pushed to the limit of his endurance, Rainsford retreats to the one place Zaroff doesn't expect him—the general's own bedroom. The final battle between the two men, like all the violence in the story, is tastefully suggested by Connell, not explicitly delineated. Zaroff, startled to find Rainsford waiting for him, quickly declares: "You have won the game!" But Rainsford offers no quarter. Connell writes:

"I am still a beast at bay," he said, in a low, hoarse voice. "Get ready, General Zaroff."

The general made one of his deepest bows. "I see," he said. "Splendid! One of us is to furnish a repast for the hounds. The other will sleep in this very excellent bed. On guard, Rainsford . . ."

He had never slept in a better bed, Rainsford decided.

Connell's story is brief, fewer than 20 pages in most printings, and seems even shorter. Unlike many of the stories that inspired Golden Age horror films, there's nothing dated or dull about the tale. With its lightning pace and ever-mounting tension, it's as thrilling a read today as it was in 1924.

Eight years passed before the first screen adaptation of "The Most Dangerous Game" reached theaters, which seems like a long wait, given the number of times the story has been filmed since. The initial screen version is itself a classic.

For his book, *Golden Horrors* (McFarland, 1996), author Bryan Senn asked more than two dozen esteemed film makers and historians to list their favorite horror films of the 1930s, then compiled their choices for a numeric ranking of the greatest films from screen terror's greatest decade. **THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME** finished in the Top 15. The late Robert Bloch and the great Ray Harryhausen, among others, placed it in their Top 10. Critic William K. Everson devoted a chapter to the film in his seminal treatise, *Classics of the Horror Film* (Citadel, 1974). Such critical respect is remarkable, since **THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME** was a mere afterthought, a by-product. The film owes its existence to the impatience of legendary producer Merian C. Cooper.

Cooper faced a long break during the production of **KING KONG** (1933). He and director Ernest B. Schoedsack had wrapped initial shooting on the film, but Willis O'Brien's painstaking animation would take many more months to complete. Restless, Cooper decided to shoot another movie during the interim, and seized on Connell's story as a likely subject. (**KONG** was shot before **THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME**, but the latter film reached theaters a year sooner than its companion project.) RKO was willing to back Cooper's "filler" movie, provided he could produce it cheaply.

With admirable savvy, Cooper reasoned that his new picture could employ many of **KONG**'s standing sets, much of its cast (Fay Wray, Robert Armstrong, Steve Clemente, and Noble Johnson), as well as its crew (most of whom were still under contract). Years later, Cooper disclosed that **THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME** cost a paltry \$150,000. **KONG** cost more than \$670,000.

What little money Cooper spent on **THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME** is visible on the screen. He hired leads Joel McCrea (Rainsford) and Leslie Banks (Zaroff), and funded art director Carroll Clark's construction of a handsome castle set. This set would be reused almost immediately for another RKO thriller featuring a demented Russian general: **SECRETS OF THE FRENCH POLICE** (1932). It was still standing, but was redressed, for RKO's **MOST DANGEROUS GAME** remake, **A GAME OF DEATH** (1945).

Cooper called on his longtime collaborator, Schoedsack, to direct, but, at RKO's insistence, brought in actor/director Irving Pichel to oversee **THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME**'s dialogue sequences. Pichel is recognizable to horror fans for his role as Countess Zaleska's ghoulish manservant in **DRACULA'S DAUGHTER** (1936). Schoedsack and Pichel would team again for Cooper's **SHE** (1935). Other key **KONG** creators recruited by Cooper for **THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME** included composer Max Steiner and screenwriter James Creelman.

Creelman penned a script remarkably faithful to its source. He took elements mentioned in passing, or merely suggested, by Connell and integrated them into **THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME**. His dialogue is often copied verbatim from the story. Creelman's most significant embellishment was the introduction of a motive, a sexual pathology, to account for Zaroff's mania. In essence, the Russian general can't get it up until after the kill. Hunting is "the whip for all other passions," in the general's words.

Like the short story, the movie opens on board the yacht, where Rainsford (McCrea) pontificates: "The world is divided into kinds of people, the hunter and hunted. Luckily, I'm a hunter. Nothing can change that." At that

moment, Rainsford's yacht collides with a coral reef, shredding its hull. Seawater pours into the boiler room, scalding helpless sailors as it strikes the engine and suddenly bursts into steam. Then the boilers explode, ripping the boat in half. This horrific sequence plays out in a powerful, Hitchcockian montage by Schoedsack, and features first-rate miniature effects (presumably supervised by photographer Henry Gerrard).

While sharks devour his companions, Rainsford swims to Zaroff's nearby island. There, wearily plodding through the jungle, he hears a gunshot and an animalistic howl. The sounds lead him toward the castle, where he meets first hulking, mute Ivan (Noble Johnson), then suave, effete Zaroff (Leslie Banks). Rainsford, however, isn't Zaroff's only "guest." The general also hosts two survivors of a previous shipwreck, Eve Trowbridge (Fay Wray) and her worthless, drunken brother, Martin (Robert Armstrong).

"God made some men poets, some he made kings. Me, he made a hunter," trumpets Zaroff, who trots out old hunting stories for after-dinner entertainment. Laboring under the illusion that he has found a kindred spirit in Rainsford, Zaroff reveals that some years ago he began to tire of hunting. He had bagged jaguars, tigers, Cape buffalo, you name it, despite handicapping himself by hunting with only a bow and arrow. The sport was no longer a challenge. Sexual potency, it seems, went by the boards along with Zaroff's appetite for sport. "When I lost my love of hunting, I lost my love of life, my love" (he leers lasciviously at Eve) "of love . . . What I needed was not a new weapon, but a new animal." But Zaroff will not reveal what his "new animal" is: "It is my one great secret," he says.

As Eve Trowbridge retires, Zaroff again betrays his mental link between hunting and sex. "What is woman, even a woman such as this" (he motions toward Eve) "until the blood has been quickened by the kill? One passion builds upon another. Kill, then love. When you have known that, you have known ecstasy."

All the film's principal players shine during this sequence. McCrea, perfectly cast as the rugged, straight-shooting hero, quietly sizes up Zaroff—and sizes up luscious Eve for good measure. Banks makes a chilling screen debut as the cunning Zaroff, who, despite his aloof demeanor, yearns for Rainsford's approval. Armstrong plays his role as Martin even more broadly than he did his turn as Carl Denham in *KONG*, but it works because Martin is supposed to be an annoying cretin.

Finally there's Wray who, in 1932 (when she also made *DOCTOR X*), was at the pinnacle of her beauty. Wray is so lovely here, it's easy to get distracted and ignore her acting. That would be a mistake, since *THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME* offers her some emotionally charged moments. For instance, she seems genuinely unnerved—her voice hushed and tremulous—as Eve explains to Rainsford that she and her brother are being held prisoner, and that two other members of their party have already disappeared.

Later that evening, Zaroff takes clueless Martin "hunting." (Martin jovially strolls off to his death, convinced the general is "swell," that the two of them are "pals.") While

Zaroff is out, Rainsford and Eve sneak into the general's trophy room. The horrified couple discover the chamber is decorated with stuffed human heads! Another severed head floats in a jar! Gerrard's atmospheric, high-contrast lighting is particularly effective in this scene.

Zaroff returns and discovers Rainsford and Eve in his trophy room. First, Zaroff is delighted, and invites Rainsford to hunt alongside him. When Rainsford balks at this proposition, Zaroff decides to hunt Rainsford—with Eve among the spoils going to the winner of their contest, which the general flippantly refers to as "outdoor chess." Creelman's script compresses the hunt into a single night. Rainsford earns his freedom (and Eve's) if he lives until dawn.

The second half of *THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME* is pure action, a nail-biting, pulse-pounding chase through the same jungle sets used in *KONG*. Rainsford and Eve flee through the swamp where, in *KONG*, Denham's sail-

ors meet a carnivorous brontosaurus, and across the same giant log that Kong sends crashing to the bottom of a deep ravine. During this lengthy chase, *THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME* hits on all cylinders. Schoedsack's kinetic pacing, Clark's breathtaking sets, and Steiner's evocative score enliven Rainsford and Eve's flight for survival.

Rainsford finds time amid this harrowing pursuit for a moment of clarity, believably rendered by McCrea. Hoisting Eve up into a tree, he realizes: "Those animals I hunted, now I know how they felt." Wray, improbably, looks even better with her clothes torn and her hair mussed. Banks, decked out in a Satanic-looking, jet-black hunting outfit, radiates menace, stalking his prey with palpable intensity. He tiptoes through the jungle, carrying a bow loaded and cocked, eyes focused like lasers on the trail ahead. Skillfully, he eludes Rainsford's traps.

Zaroff thinks the game is over when Rainsford falls from a cliff. But Rainsford survives, landing in a lagoon and swimming back to the castle for a showdown with the general. Unfortunately, their climactic battle provides the

film's only disappointment. Instead of having Rainsford attack Zaroff like a bloodthirsty animal (as in the story), Creelman opts for a more conventional resolution: Rainsford approaches Zaroff. Zaroff pulls a gun. He and Rainsford struggle and, predictably, the weapon discharges, mortally wounding the general. Thankfully, *THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME* boasts more than enough thrills to overcome its routine finale.

The picture was a commercial success in its day (although not a triumph on the order of *KONG*). Critical opinion was divided, but notoriously horror-averse *New York Times* critic Mordaunt Hall praised it as "a highly satisfactory melodrama. It has the much-desired virtue of originality which, in no small measure, compensates for some of its gruesome ideas and its weird plot."

This "virtue of originality," which Hall touts, is woefully absent from future screen versions of Connell's story. *A GAME OF DEATH*, RKO's remake of their 1932 hit, is undercut by its depressing dearth of fresh ideas. While not



As Carl Denham in *KING KONG* (1933), Robert Armstrong was a master of all domains. As Martin Trowbridge in *THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME*, he was an obnoxious lush hunted down and killed like a wild beast.



LEFT: John Loder and Audrey Long starred in *A GAME OF DEATH* (1945), directed by Robert Wise. **RIGHT:** The following decade brought Richard Widmark and Jane Greer in *RUN FOR THE SUN* (1956)—better than *A GAME OF DEATH*, not nearly as good as *THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME*.

truly a bad film, *A GAME OF DEATH* ranks as a mild disappointment.

Consider that, with Val Lewton protégé Robert Wise at its helm, *A GAME OF DEATH* might have returned the tale to the suggestive, psychological approach of Connell's original story. How might a literate, Lewtonesque adaptation of "The Most Dangerous Game" have unfolded? We will never know, because instead of going this route, *A GAME OF DEATH* (likely by studio mandate) simply apes its 1932 predecessor.

The picture's plot, much of its dialogue, and a member of its cast (Noble Johnson, who reprises his role as the hunter's henchman) are lifted directly from *THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME*. *A GAME OF DEATH* borrows a startling amount of stock footage from the first version, as well. Even the heroine's screams are recycled, with Wray's voice dubbed in over starlet Audrey Long's. The whole project seems so redundant, you wonder why RKO didn't save money and simply reissue the first picture!

Amazingly, Creelman receives no screen credit for *A GAME OF DEATH*, even though Norman Houston's script mimics Creelman's, with only cosmetic diversions. For the sake of wartime political correctness, the mad count's nationality is changed from Russian to German. Due to Production Code restrictions, the sexual element of Zaroff's madness is played down. His insanity is attributed to a

head wound suffered during a tussle with a Cape buffalo. This wound is mentioned in the original, but relatively little is made of it.

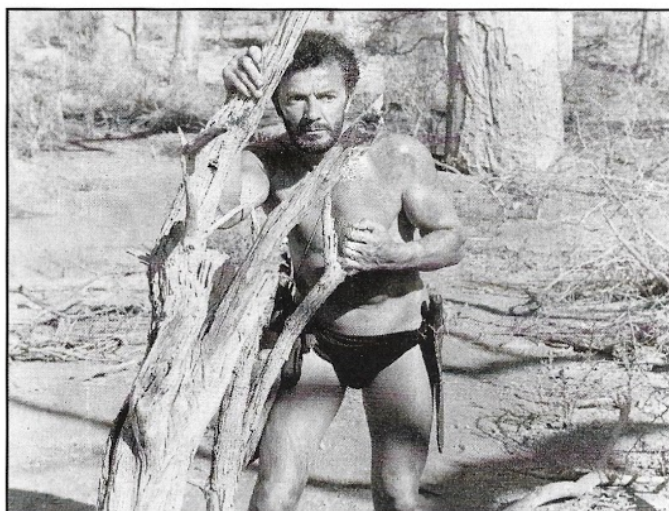
Houston's script elongates the castle intrigue of the film's first half, at the expense of the chase sequence. Perhaps this was planned to give Clark's aging but still good-looking castle set more screen time, and less exposure to this film's cut-rate jungle sets (which look like parts of *GILLIGAN'S ISLAND*). Whatever the rationale, these alterations sabotage the breakneck pacing of the original. *A GAME OF DEATH* seems much longer than *THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME*, even though the remake's running time is barely eight minutes greater.

A GAME OF DEATH's cast is considerably weaker than *THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME*'s, too, and there's not a single technician (other than Wise) who worked on the remake of equal stature to his companion from the original. *A GAME OF DEATH* composer Sam Sawtell versus Max Steiner? No contest! But this is hardly a fair comparison.

As chronicled previously, *THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME* was produced inexpensively only because of its serendipitous relationship with *KONG*, an A picture with an extravagant budget. For *KONG*, his dream project, Cooper

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LEFT: *RUN FOR THE SUN* moved the action from a lonely island to a jungle plantation. **RIGHT:** Keeping the jungle setting, Cornel Wilde starred in and directed *THE NAKED PREY* (1966), a "game" variation on Richard Connell's original theme.



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FAY WRAY

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"Why do people have to eat?" he said. "I don't eat!" He was not a warm personality in any way. No, I didn't feel comfortable with Michael Curtiz at all!

SS: Both *THE MYSTERY OF THE WAX MUSEUM* and *DOCTOR X* were filmed in early Technicolor.

FW: That was difficult. It was just too hot. They had to use so much light to photograph color that it was almost unbearable. Awful experience!

SS: Were you all soaking wet?

FW: Well, I don't know, because I am polite and I don't do that. (Laughs)

SS: Lucky for your leading man!

FW: Well, I wasn't dripping or anything, but I was just sweltering like I was in an oven.

SS: It must have been awfully hard to feel creative.

FW: Awful! Awful! I mean, you couldn't feel lighthearted. They left the lights on, because a lot of scenes were so sustained that you needed quite a bit of time. But, it was an unhealthy feeling. Our clothes felt like they were too much—like we just wanted to rip everything off!

SS: Well, that certainly would have made for an interesting film!

FW: (Laughs) Well, I don't really mean that! But, it was just a miserable experience!

SS: In a recent edition of *Video Watchdog* [#42], it was reported that *DOCTOR X* had two cinematographers: Ray Rennahan, who handled the Technicolor filming, and Richard Towers, who filmed in black and white. Do you remember both men working on the film?

FW: No, I do not remember. I just plain don't. I remember Ray Rennahan, because he was the Technicolor fella, but the black-and-white side of the equation doesn't do anything for me at all.

SS: Could they have shot the black-and-white version simultaneously without telling you?

FW: No! Oh, they wouldn't do that. You couldn't have gotten away with that with me. I'd have known there were two cameras there. Still, it's possible I'm wrong, so I am not going to claim yes or no on this question.

SS: In *DOCTOR X*, you make your first entrance screaming for no apparent reason.

FW: I don't remember that! Well, I probably never saw the film! My first scene in *THE MYSTERY OF THE WAX MUSEUM* had me in costume as Marie Antoinette—posing for what, I don't remember. But, I never saw the films after they were finished.

SS: Did you scream so much on these films that you wore out your voice?

FW: No, no, no . . . anyone who sings knows that you don't wear it out if you're used to using it, and use it without hurting yourself. Screaming or singing will not make you hoarse if you do it correctly.

SS: Were you under contract or freelance?

FW: Freelance.

SS: So you didn't have a studio voice teacher. Did you study voice on your own?

FW: No, it was just instinctive. I knew what I had to do. I was aware of music and voice because I had two sisters who could sing beautifully. They studied voice. One was a soprano and one was a mezzo. But, I didn't have their talent. I couldn't sing on pitch. I could scream on pitch, apparently! (Laughs)

SS: Who would believe that, of the Wray Sisters, the one who couldn't sing would become famous for her "high note?" In your horror movies, you rarely played scenes opposite other actresses. How was it working with Glenda Farrell on *WAX MUSEUM*?

FW: Well, in most of the films, I was the



Say, shouldn't Fay Wray be helping Joel McCrea through the jungle instead of the other way around? After all, the poor girl had to stumble through it twice!

only girl. It was kind of a pleasant experience. It was almost an intrusion to have another woman in the film! But, I didn't really feel Glenda Farrell was an intrusion; she was a very sociable, talkative, expressive girl. Very different than I. I was pretty quiet. I am not so quiet today, that's true—but, I used to be rather quiet. Lots of thoughts, lots of ideas, but, I never spoke up . . .

SS: What changed you?

FW: Growing older and getting a sense of freedom. Now I feel that whatever I say has to be accepted. No one can deny me anything. Anything! (Laughs) And that is an achievement, I think, to come to the age I am today. It makes me feel very free. I think it's a plus, it's really a plus for me. Sometimes when people get older, they're inclined to think, "Oh, dear, I'm older! Oh, dear, oh, dear!" I think, "Oh, boy, how wonderful!"

SS: Well, it certainly agrees with you. You're one of the few people who go through decades with the same contours to their face. The same face as in *THE WEDDING MARCH* . . .

FW: Oh, that was such a lovely film, wasn't it? It was just the greatest joy, like heaven had picked me up and made me happy. It was very rough sometimes, though, because Erich von Stroheim was a hard taskmaster. But, I enjoyed that. I respected him so much. I never felt angry if he got in a heavy mood. No, I really liked him and went on liking him and cared about him as an individual. He played in a theater here in New York in *ARSENIC AND OLD LACE* and he shouldn't have been doing it. That

was not a role for him. He was above that. He was a genius. It was so beautiful to have him accept me without any screen test—after just an interview and watching my feelings. See, he was telling me the story he was going to film and watching me while he told me. When he said, "Do you think you could play that role?" I said, "I know I could." He put out his hand and said, "Goodbye, Mitzi"—and that was the name of the character. When he said that, I knew with certainty that he wanted me to be Mitzi. Well, I couldn't even put my hand out to take his hand and say goodbye. I was so thrilled that I just sobbed and put my face in my hands.

SS: You were very young, then, weren't you?

FW: I was just 17, I think. But, wasn't his reaction wonderful? It was. He said, "Oh, I can work with her." And he said to my agent, "Let's go and see the manager of the studio." And I knew that my life had changed in that minute.

SS: Is it true that von Stroheim fell in love with you?

FW: I don't think so. He always had a love for me, that's true, but it wasn't deep. I adored him. I was the aggressor, really, the silent aggressor—I'll admit that, be-

cause I thought he was so wonderful. I was so unhappy when I wasn't allowed in the studio for a stretch of time, when they shot things that he thought I shouldn't have any connection with—scenes in a brothel. Oh, I felt terrible; I was just so lonely. I wanted to be there all the time.

SS: You survived the transition from silent to sound films. It must have been a particularly anxious time in Hollywood.

FW: There was a friend of my husband, John Monk Saunders, who was in charge of the sound department, which was a reassuring thing. When I tried to express myself it came out pretty tinny, but even so they could understand what I was saying. That turned out to be a plus.

SS: Were you afraid of making the transition to sound?

FW: No, no, absolutely not. Certainly all of us sounded too light, without any



LEFT: Fay Wray found costar Lionel Atwill to be a "profile," which he happily displays in this publicity shot from *DOCTOR X* (1932). **RIGHT:** Fay played two roles in *THE MYSTERY OF THE WAX MUSEUM* (1933), one living, the other "wax," as a statue of Marie Antoinette.

rich tones to our voices—but still it was audible. It could be heard.

SS: Others didn't fare quite so well.

FW: There was an incident when we were rehearsing with Paul Lukas. He had a particularly amusing accent, so I chuckled. That was terrible; I shouldn't have done that, but he took it too seriously. He got up and said he couldn't work with people who laughed at him! He was just teasing me—I knew that later—but he said he'd have to leave because it wasn't fair to have anyone in the room making fun of what he had to say. He had a good sense of humor, really.

SS: Did any of your friends fail in making the jump to talkies?

FW: No, the only person who had trouble—or thought she did—was Jean Arthur, who turned out to have a wonderful voice. She left Hollywood and went to study in the East with Maude Adams, who was at a school in Ohio. She studied and I guess it helped her breathing. She felt that her breathing was incorrect; her voice was too breathy.

SS: Erich von Stroheim may not have been in love with you, but there's no denying that you attracted a lot of very talented men—writers, especially.

FW: I always admired good writing and read everything that came out. When I was married to John Monk Saunders, he read everything, too.

SS: When you were a young girl, did you ever consider becoming a writer instead of an actress?

FW: No, never.

SS: When did you decide to write?

FW: When I was involved with Clifford Odets. I decided it was high time for me to write, too. He'd written two failures after I knew him, but when I'd been with him he told me he had the "formula" and could do it over and over. Even at that time, I didn't want to hear that there was a formula. Instinctively, I knew it was a mistake and he was going to be in some trouble from that. Then I thought, "I could write a . . . I *will* write a play."

SS: That was back in the forties. Was Clifford Odets one of your great loves?

FW: Yes. He was a spellbinding person. I thought he had so much genuine caring for the world. I believed in that. I believed in him. I still think he had a great deal. He didn't just . . . self-destruct for me. It was difficult for me not to stay with him.

SS: Any regrets about breaking up?

FW: Oh, no. That was the best thing he ever did for me. It was difficult, though.

SS: Did you ever see him again?

FW: He wouldn't. But he told Irene Selznick, his very close friend, that he never stopped mourning. He said that I was the only person he ever loved.

SS: He was notorious for treating women badly. Frances Farmer, Luise Rainer . . .

FW: None of that mattered to me, because I thought I saw him for what he was—or what I thought he was. And he was talented, no doubt about that. But, he thought his talent was based on misery and that if he became happy it would just go. He believed that.

SS: That's too bad. Speaking of the men in your life, there's another leading man and

LEFT: One of Fay's rare female costars, Glenda Farrell, greets Lionel Atwill in *THE MYSTERY OF THE WAX MUSEUM*. Arthur Edward Carewe, Fay, and Allen Vincent round out the merry group. **RIGHT:** Fay prefers to forget *VAMPIRE BAT* (1933), a cheapie with Atwill and Maude Eburne.



another film that we haven't covered. The film is *VAMPIRE BAT* . . .

FW: It didn't make much of an impression. It had Lionel Atwill and, if it had much of a story, I don't remember what it was.

SS: For one thing, Melvyn Douglas played your love interest.

FW: He was very compelling, because he was very sure of himself. He had great style. I had great respect for him and even had a crush on him. I liked him well enough to have that little crush. It's nice to have a crush on your leading man. (Laughs)

SS: Was he a good "crushee?"

FW: No, not much of a "crushee!" He was just a good actor who evoked these attitudes that made me like him. His style was one that I could respect. Very intelligent. His wife, Helen Gahagan, was an intelligent lady, too.

SS: Maybe that's why you had a crush on him—since you thought he wouldn't respond and you'd be safe.

FW: No, I knew he wouldn't respond—and I wouldn't even have wanted to make him respond, to tell you the truth. It's just that he was such a compelling and attractive individual. He was so strong and so sure of what he was doing. No question of what he was performing. He was just admirably in place for himself, even though it was an awful film! Nobody had a very good role in *VAMPIRE BAT*!

SS: On the subject of love interests, you worked a lot with Gary Cooper, didn't you?

FW: Gary Cooper? I did four films with him and he did *WINGS*, which my husband had written. Cooper stayed out late one night and came on the set very sleepy. He never did become totally awake for the scene. That's how he got a reputation as a sleepy actor! He was always tired and worn out! I remember once, he woke up and I was sitting beside him. He made the obligatory pass at me and I just made no response at all. That was my style. I never responded to anyone—never, never, never. Because even a "no" was a conversation. So, my secret was not to respond. I didn't respond to Gary any more than I did to anyone else—and he went back to sleep! (Laughs)

SS: You didn't respond to Cary Grant, either, did you?

FW: Oh, that was before he even did film. We were doing a play in New York by John Monk Saunders called *NIKKI*. I wouldn't have been in it, except that the girl who was supposed to do it was the daughter of the investor and things weren't going well. So they sent for me. Cary had a crush on me. Whenever we went to a party, he would always sit on the floor beside me. I thought that was kind of beautiful, like that's where he wanted to be. And he was wonderful to work with on stage. He would move downstage, so that as he looked at me the audience had to look at me, too. He knew a lot about the theater and how to move around. He was very secure. David Manners did the film version, *THE LAST FLIGHT*.

SS: One of David Manners' costars in *DRACULA* was with you in *VAMPIRE BAT*: Dwight Frye.

FW: Yes, he was. A while ago some of his relatives asked me to try and help get him a star on Hollywood Boulevard, but there wasn't much I could do for them.

SS: Did you ever hear what happened to Dwight Frye? He couldn't get much work towards the end of his life and was even reduced to playing a peeping tom in a cheap nudie film.

FW: Oh, no! How sad!

SS: Then his luck changed and he was cast in a major role in the film *WILSON*. He took his wife and child to a movie to celebrate and then dropped dead on a bus on the way home. He was only 44.



Fay Wray and Lionel Atwill

FW: Oh, that is awful! *WILSON*? That's interesting. I left films to marry Robert Riskin and Fox Studios was keen to have me play the part of Mrs. Woodrow Wilson. Can you imagine? I'm not big enough for her physically, but that didn't seem to matter much to them!

As we left the Paramount Hotel, word had spread from the waiters to the maitre' d to the other diners and there was now a small crowd waiting to say hello to the screen legend. I was beginning to realize that people are funny with Fay. They're one part awe-stricken and one part sure that they have known her all their lives. She held court for about 15 minutes signing autographs. I was amazed at what people knew about her. They were asking about all of the films, not just *KING KONG*. She told stories of her leading men and how

Merian Cooper almost put Kong on top of the Chrysler Building till he was invited to the opening day festivities at the Empire State Building and saw the view. The crowd grew slowly and she transfixed them. As they listened, I realized that I had never seen as many jaws—young and old—dropped in unison before. I helped Fay wend her way down the "Titanic" staircase and soon we were back in Times Square. Fay suggested we walk so that we could see the recently-lit Christmas tree at Rockefeller Center. We talked more on the way.

SS: What was it like to stop making pictures when you married screenwriter Robert Riskin?

FW: It was not hard, because I felt the time had come when I should. There was the hope of having a family life and this appealed to me enormously. Anyhow, we were living at the Ritz Hotel in New York, because Robert Riskin had been working for the government for a few years making documentary films. I had already had my first child, Susan, from John Monk Saunders, and then I had Bobby, who was still a tiny thing, just a little fellow, and I didn't want to work. But, I thought maybe Robert Riskin would be glad if I did work, because he'd made a magnificent salary in Hollywood and now he was working for the government and getting almost nothing. So I thought maybe he'd like me to do *WILSON*, and he was hoping that I wouldn't. It was several days before we came to an open understanding. It was such a sweet relief to me, because I had always worked and it was time to do something else.

SS: Was it difficult when Robert Riskin was ill and you went back to work in the fifties?

FW: I had to go back. After the first year of his illness, the cost of hospitalization and bills ate up everything we had—and he was sick for five years. I really had to go back to work.

SS: Was it hard for you?

FW: It had been about 10 years and I wasn't doing the pictures I would really have liked to have done, but there was a kindness and generosity and sweet feeling toward me that was quite lovely. I did get a larger salary than I ever had before, and that was because they cared.

SS: They must have loved you and Robert Riskin both.

FW: I think so, I think so . . .

SS: What do you think of your films from that period?

FW: Oh, the first one I did was with that very pretty little girl who does commercials, now, with her little grandchild . . .

SS: Jane Powell?

FW: Yes, it was *SMALL TOWN GIRL*, and then there was *TAMMY AND THE BACHELOR*. Debbie Reynolds was adorable, but she never could stop talking! She always had this lovely enthusiasm and desire to express herself that just went and went and went! The director stood behind her once and made the gesture, "How can you stop her?" (Laughs) But, she's dear; she is a lovely person.

SS: Do you ever see her?

FW: No, except on the screen I've been seeing her lately, haven't I?

SS: Yes, she's back. In the fifties, you made some teenage films, including *ROCK PRETTY BABY* and *DRAGSTRIP RIOT*.

FW: I did them to make money. I didn't have any real respect for them at all. In the first place, I didn't understand them. **SS:** They're not seen very much these days.

FW: That's fine! I think that's good! (Laughs)

SS: Did you happen to see *REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE* during that era?

FW: Oh, Natalie Wood had been in a series that I did called *THE PRIDE OF THE FAMILY*. *REBEL* came right after and she was suddenly a big star! She had a lovely quality, just lovely, and on one occasion on our show she played a very old lady and did it extremely well. The talent she had was obvious.

SS: Her death must have hit you hard.

FW: Oh! So sad! Yes, it seemed incomprehensible. I don't know what happened that night. Something strange happened. It's very odd that she would have just gone into that water. She had such a delicate, vulnerable quality.

SS: You made *THE COBWEB* for director Vincente Minnelli. What was it like to work with Lauren Bacall, Gloria Grahame, Lillian Gish, Oscar Levant . . . ?

FW: I was interested in Lillian Gish. I thought she was a tremendous talent

and I had always admired whatever she had done. Sometimes I'd sit in her dressing room and talk about what she hoped for as a national expression of theater. She thought that there should be a cabinet position for the arts and I think she was right.

SS: Did you get to know anyone else on the *COBWEB* set?

FW: Oscar Levant was kind of wonderfully ridiculous, wonderfully show-offy. One time, we went to a little luncheon given by the Goldwyns and Oscar demanded that he be served in the entrance hall by himself at a little round table. He didn't want anyone to come near him. Just him there, eating. It was very effective. He got people's attention and everyone came to him! He was a rascal!

SS: And Lauren Bacall?

FW: We had the same designer and we were in wardrobe one day at the same time, but it didn't have any particular significance for me—or for her, either, I'm sure! (Laughs)

SS: You made *QUEEN BEE* with Joan Crawford. Did the star live up to the title?

FW: Well, one would have to say yes . . . and so one is saying yes! (Laughs) Joan was not a happy person and she liked showing that. She worked on her fan mail all day long. I just didn't understand that, but she did. She washed her hands a lot. She washed her arms all the way up past her elbows. She just couldn't get

enough done in that direction. She was compulsive about being clean, clean, clean! She had beautiful furs to wear for that role, and those white furs were very clean; they looked immaculate! On one occasion, she mispronounced a word and she apologized to the director. He dismissed it by saying, "Well, don't say it, then"—making it clear that it was not important. I thought that was wonderful! She was so worried about herself, I felt. She was a good soul, a good soul. She wanted to be nice to everybody and kind, certainly kind to her fans. She thought about them a lot. Kind of a "queenish" thing to be doing . . .

SS: You were great in that film.

FW: Was I? Oh, my goodness!

SS: You made the character into something worthy of Tennessee Williams. It was very touching.

FW: I say! Really? I've never even seen it! She was a rather pathetic creature, wasn't she?

SS: Not pathetic, really, but very moving.

FW: Well, I'll be darned!

SS: You did a lot of TV in the fifties and sixties. It must have been an experience to work with Raymond Burr on *PERRY MASON*.

FW: I can tell you he was an extraordinary performer, always interesting. I can also tell you that he always read his material on camera and that was dismaying to me. I couldn't understand how anyone could depend on reading rather than memorizing. He had so



"I was aware of voice because I had two sisters who could sing beautifully. They studied voice. One was a soprano and one was a mezzo. But, I didn't have their talent. I couldn't sing on pitch. I could scream on pitch, apparently!"

much to do, perhaps you can't blame him. I certainly didn't hold it against him, because I liked him too well.

SS: Did he look you in the eye when he acted or at the monitor?

FW: Oh, the monitor—but in intimate scenes that demanded you look at each other, he might not have done that. Medium shots are what I'm talking about.

SS: You rarely talk about your TV work.

FW: Oh, well, I don't mention it much because it doesn't fit in with anything else I've ever done. I did the series with Natalie Wood as my daughter. Paul Hartman had the lead. He was a real bumpkin and I was a pretty elegant wife for him, it seemed to me. (Laughs) I think the studio gave me that series on purpose, because they knew perfectly well that Robert Riskin was ill and that I needed work. They gave me that series to do. It was nice, because it was out in the valley and I could go to the Motion Picture Country Home between scenes and see Bob.

SS: That must have been difficult for you.

FW: It wasn't hard work, but it was a painful time. He did have wonderful care there, incredibly good care. Bob had a beautiful mind. A beautiful mind, really. And he didn't lose his talent, ever. He just didn't have it all together anymore, after that stroke. Anyhow, we did that series for 13 weeks, which was all a series lasted in the early days.

SS: And then you did a lot of television over the next 15 years?

FW: I guess I did, but none was really memorable.

SS: Gloria Stuart is being touted as a possible Oscar nominee for *TITANIC*, in the role you might have played. Do you have any regrets about not doing it?

FW: Absolutely none whatsoever! None, none, none! I think it would have been a tortuous experience altogether. I feel good about where my life is, now. I feel free and joyous and happy and more liberated than I've ever been. Instead of going to shoot *TITANIC*, my play *THE MEADOWLARK* was presented in New Hampshire and that was worth 20 *TITANIC*s. It was so satisfying—a great reward, just to see it done well. And it was beautifully directed by my daughter, Susan Riskin. Imagine, a play about my mother directed by my daughter!

SS: But don't you ever think of coming back and working in films?

FW: No. I really wouldn't want to. I love films, I love the camera—I love the thought that, when you're in front of the camera, whatever you do can go around the world. Isn't that a marvelous feeling to have? That's a beautiful feeling. But, I think the quality of films is questionable.

I don't know how to hold a gun. I'd have no idea what to do with one if it came near me. It seems like everyone in films has to have a gun! And explosions! Explosions! Kerosene blowing up all the time! If I ever was going to invest in anything it would be kerosene!

As we arrived at her swank, luxury high-rise, Fay invited me upstairs to continue the conversation. It was clear the staff loved her, as they hurried to the doors to open them for us, asking about our evening. We were soon a half mile above Manhattan in what she calls her "ivory tower." The city at our feet, the talk naturally turned once more to her most famous costar . . .

FW: Oh, Kong? Kong has always been fascinatingly present in my life. When I was in Paris at the Folies Bergère, there was a wonderful revue with King Kong. I went to see the show and a very popular Folies star was in the big hand.

SS: When was this?

FW: Long time ago—before Merian Cooper died. Maybe 30 years ago. And there were a lot of six-foot-plus guys in gorilla suits. It was really quite exciting!

SS: Who knew what a hit *KING KONG* would be, right?

FW: He's hung around a long time. That's what I told him in my book: "You made only one movie and I made 80 and the one you made has been fabulously well known." So he has the edge over me, hasn't he? (Laughs)

SS: Hey, your films are pretty well known by our readers. What's your most vivid memory of working on *KING KONG*?

FW: Hmmm . . . that's a big one, 'cause he was a pretty big fella! I would have to say that it was working in the hand, which I had to do so many times, and having to simulate trying to get away from him when I was really trying to hold on! (Laughs)

SS: So you had to look like you were trying to break free while you were actually hanging on for dear life?

FW: Yes! Because if I had fallen, I would have dropped at least six feet to the stage! That would've been more than enough to hurt me, wouldn't it? So I had to make it look as though I couldn't stand him and had to hit at him—but I was hoping I could hold on long enough to do that efficiently.

SS: Was the hand mechanized?

FW: Oh, yes. It could move, because they were rubberized fingers. Every time I moved, they opened up a little more and that was the hazard.

SS: It wasn't electronic, though. The hand had to be moved manually?

FW: Oh, absolutely. It was rubberized and every move I made pushed the fingers farther apart.

SS: Did you have any conception of how it would look on the screen?

FW: No, but occasionally I'd go to the projection room and see the little figure they had in the hand of the little King Kong. When that figure started moving, I knew it was me. It had to be me—nobody else! (Laughs) That little figure was about three inches long, and that was me. The difference between my actual size and that little three-inch creature was handled in an extraordinarily interesting way, I thought.

SS: What's your secret for having such a happy, fulfilled life?

FW: A secret? Oh, have I got a secret? I didn't know I did!

SS: C'mon, now!

FW: I would say the secret is to be enthusiastic about everything that comes into your life. To care, to care about people. To be excited about everything that comes close to you. I love to read. And I love to write, mostly. If I'm doing something creative, I'm in the best form that I can possibly be . . .

SS: Is there anything else you want people to know? Any advice you might like to give?

FW: As far as advice, that will be in my next book. I certainly never like to instruct anyone, but just say as I feel. That's the same as advice, isn't it?

SS: Sure. Do you have a title yet?

FW: Oh, yes! *Scene by Scene: as Seen by Fay Wray*. It'll be about different incidents. Just my feelings about quite a few people. Attitudes. My thoughts about the universe and simple things like that. (Laughs)

SS: No warnings about Lionel Atwill's orgies or wicked, wicked Hollywood?

FW: No, when I talk about Hollywood, I have a different view than most people. It is not a chintzy place! It is not "Tinseltown" at all! A lot of talent, an enormous amount of talent traveled through this town and made a strong, strong imprint on film—and that will always remain. There is a lot of strength and intelligence in Hollywood.

SS: So many people dismiss Hollywood as an intellectual wasteland.

FW: Oh, that's too easy. So very easy to knock something. It becomes a sort of unattractive habit. Erich von Stroheim, with whom I worked, was a very brilliant director. Ernst Lubitsch was brilliant. He told me he had always wanted to work with me and I wish we had. He had the kind of talent that would have been wonderful to share.

Continued on page 70



Record Rack

Disney

Unlocks the Music Vault

by Ross Care

Given the recent conversion of Earth to Walt Disney Planet, it's a bit hard to recall the dim days when Disney was considered a potent, original force only in the realm of mere filmmaking. But it is true that, prior to world takeover, Walt Disney was once admired as an innovative master of total cinema by artists as diverse as Kurt Weill, Charlie Chaplin, Jerome Kern, Sergei Eisenstein, and Ray Bradbury. (Bradbury once wrote: "I lived in terror I might be struck by a car and killed before the premiere of *FANTASIA*," and, inspired by a 1965 visit to Disneyland, prophetically predicted: "I believe Disney's influence will be felt centuries from today.")

While the studio had abandoned the primal power of its earliest features long before Disney's death in 1966, Disney's mythic/horrific influences graphically manifested themselves throughout the period (1928-1942) that marked the development of the studio's first influential shorts work, and climaxed in the first animated full-length films. *SKELETON DANCE* (1928), the first Silly Symphony short, was originally to have been based on Saint Saens' symphonic *Dance of Death*, the "Danse Macabre." (Due to copyright complications, the final score was a pastiche of classical and original music by Carl Stalling, who scored about 15 shorts for Disney in the late twenties before moving on to Warner Bros.) A little more than a decade later (but what a decade as far as aesthetic and technological progress was concerned!), Disney returned to the danse macabre motif in its

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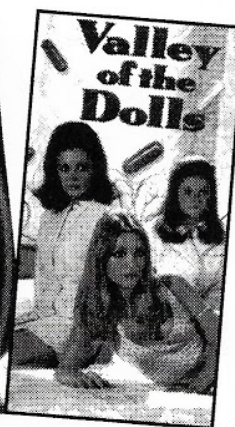
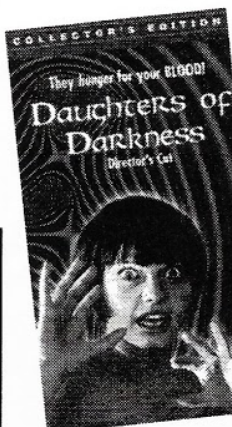
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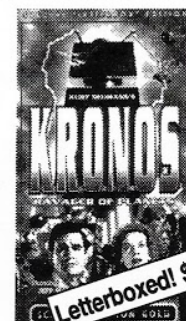
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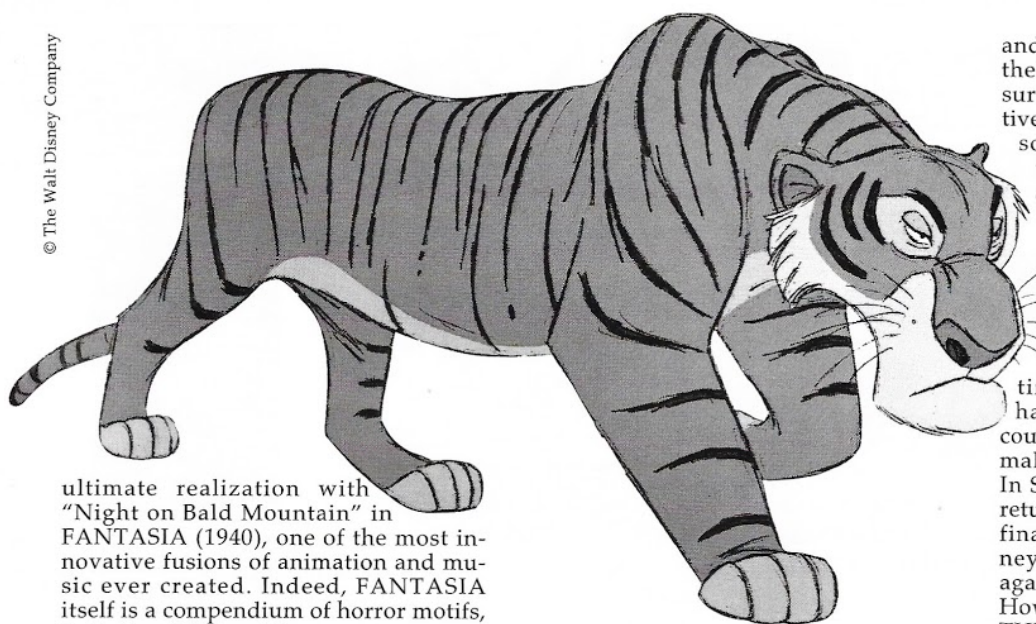
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ultimate realization with "Night on Bald Mountain" in *FANTASIA* (1940), one of the most innovative fusions of animation and music ever created. Indeed, *FANTASIA* itself is a compendium of horror motifs, including Mickey Mouse as an ax murderer, a *KING KONG* dinosaur sequence, and "Bald Mountain" itself, the style of which (aside from being derived from the primal designs of noted illustrator Kay Nielsen) was influenced by the look of the Universal horror classics, notably the graveyard scene in *BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN* (1935).

Derived as they were from mythic European sources and childhood classics, Disney's initial animated features achieve a powerful, horrific ambience that the studio never really recaptured. It is fascinating to note that, for all the sunny triviality with which Disney is still stereotyped (though not by Southern Baptists), each of the first features deals in some way, either symbolically or overtly, with death and resurrection. Obviously, both *SNOW WHITE* (1937) and *PINOCCHIO* (1940), Disney's first two features, do so overtly. (On its original release in Britain, the Grimm Gothicism of *SNOW WHITE* was considered so disturbing that children under a certain age were not allowed to experience

it.) In *BAMBI* (1942), the wounded title character is virtually willed back to life by the imposing father figure of the imperious stag, the patriarchal (and reclusive) "Great Prince of the Forest." Even *DUMBO* (1941), seemingly the most featherweight of the first features, puts the hero through a litany, one might almost say a Calvary of trauma, until he achieves transcendence, i.e., stardom, through his special gift. (Interesting to also note that the mute Dumbo has no father at all, and is "delivered" by a flighty stork.)

Several circumstances stalled the momentum with which the studio shot from the crude but vital primitivism of the first Mouse and Symphony shorts to the technical/aesthetic finesse of the last great Silly Symphonies and the first animated features. Most of the post-*SNOW WHITE* features failed to perform well at the box-office, in part because World War II cut off Disney's lucrative European market. The war also redirected Disney's resources to government films

and related war business (which nonetheless helped the struggling studio to survive financially). Finally, the disruptive animator's strike of 1941 cost Disney some of his best artists and a lot of team spirit. All three factors effected a general studio realignment on all levels (including musical), and occasioned a certain falling off of the studio's initial power.

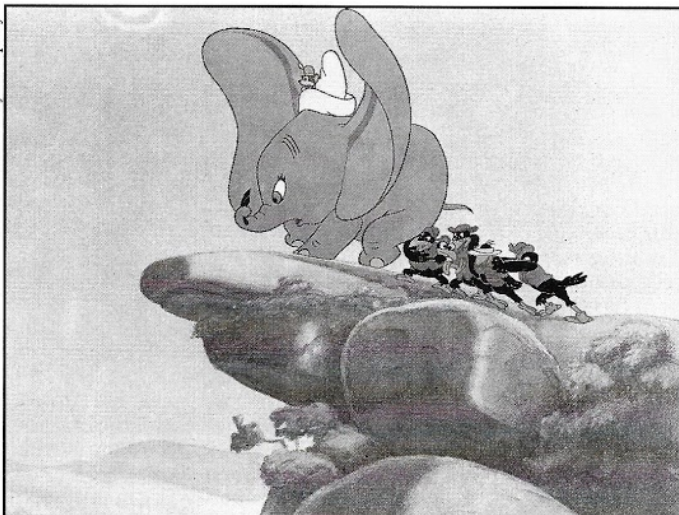
The Body Electric

Even so, Walt Disney never quite shook the death/resurrection motif (one might say, obsession) that haunts his oeuvre (and which is, of course, also intrinsic to much of the primal source material he chose to adapt). In *SLEEPING BEAUTY* (1959), it again returns overtly, but with the costly film's financial/critical disappointment, Disney embraced the modern age, never again to return to the classical fairy tale. However, the motif resurfaces as late as *THE JUNGLE BOOK* (1967), the last feature Disney supervised, but there parodied and played for easy sentiment with the fake death of Baloo the Bear, and by then having become little more than a manipulative plot device that had been previously used with more conviction in *LADY AND THE TRAMP* (1955), and as early as "Peter and the Wolf" in *MAKE MINE MUSIC* (1946).

But even in the more obscure Disney films, the theme remains pervasive: from that pagan paradigm for many death/resurrection myths, Persephone, adapted in the operatic 1934 Silly Symphony, *THE GODDESS OF SPRING* (which envisions Hell as a Harlem nightclub!), through later, lesser-known shorts such as *THE LITTLE HOUSE* and *SUSIE THE LITTLE BLUE COUPE* (both 1952), in both of which, tellingly, the title characters are revived by technology rather than love or goodness. Even the aggressively cheery world of the theme parks, Disney's last great enthusiasm and success, did not completely eradicate the specter, but feature death whimsified in

PREVIOUS PAGE: The Wicked Stepmother holds the key to the happiness of *CINDERELLA* (1950). **ABOVE:** Suave George Sanders lent his voice to suave Shere Khan in *THE JUNGLE BOOK* (1967). **BOTTOM LEFT:** Thumper and Flower introduce *BAMBI* (1942) to a butterfly. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** Young Peter Behn provided the voice of young Thumper the Rabbit.





LEFT: With the help of Timothy Mouse and some affable crows, *DUMBO* (1942) puts his admirable ears to the grindstone and soars into fame and fortune. **RIGHT:** One of Walt Disney's favorite actresses, Verna Felton gave life to such diverse characters as the gentle Fairy Godmother in *CINDERELLA*, the bombastic Queen of Hearts in *ALICE IN WONDERLAND* (1951), Aunt Sarah in *LADY AND THE TRAMP* (1955), and Flora in *SLEEPING BEAUTY* (1959). Her voice work in bracketed by two elephants: in *DUMBO* and *THE JUNGLE BOOK*. **BELOW:** Louis Prima hits the groove as King Louie in *THE JUNGLE BOOK*.

that high tech recycling of the old amusement park spook house, the Haunted Mansion (which, with its cinematic continuity, controlled POV seating, and sustained ride-through soundtrack, is the closest the parks come to recreating the seamless fluidity of film in three-dimensions). It's also perhaps inevitable that this ongoing preoccupation with mortality in Disney should result in the maestro's ultimate technological imitation of life: audio-animatronics. Forget Snow White's Scary Adventures: to me the spookiest things in Disneyland are those Indiana Jones zombies in the "Temple of Doom" ride!

The Real Classic Soundtracks

Recently, Disney Records finally debuted their series of new original soundtrack CDs from the animated features. Overseen by Grammy-winning producer Randy Thornton, they represent the three major periods of genuinely classic Disney: *BAMBI*, from the Golden Age of the first shorts and features, *CINDERELLA* (1950), which launched the studio's animation revival of the early fifties, and *SLEEPING BEAUTY*, from the already "Neo" age of late fifties/sixties Disney. The Disney Company practically invented recycling, and these scores have appeared in countless guises over the years (including their previously most complete recorded realizations on the Disneyland Records WDL-4000 LPs from the fifties), but they have never received as comprehensive a reissue as these on compact disc.

The Horror of Bambi

My very first RECORD RACK column on the CD release of *SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS* and *PINOCCHIO* (*Scarlet Street* #12, Fall 1993) closed hoping for a *BAMBI* disc as thorough as those from Disney's initial two features, because around that time *BAMBI* had been released only as a disappointing

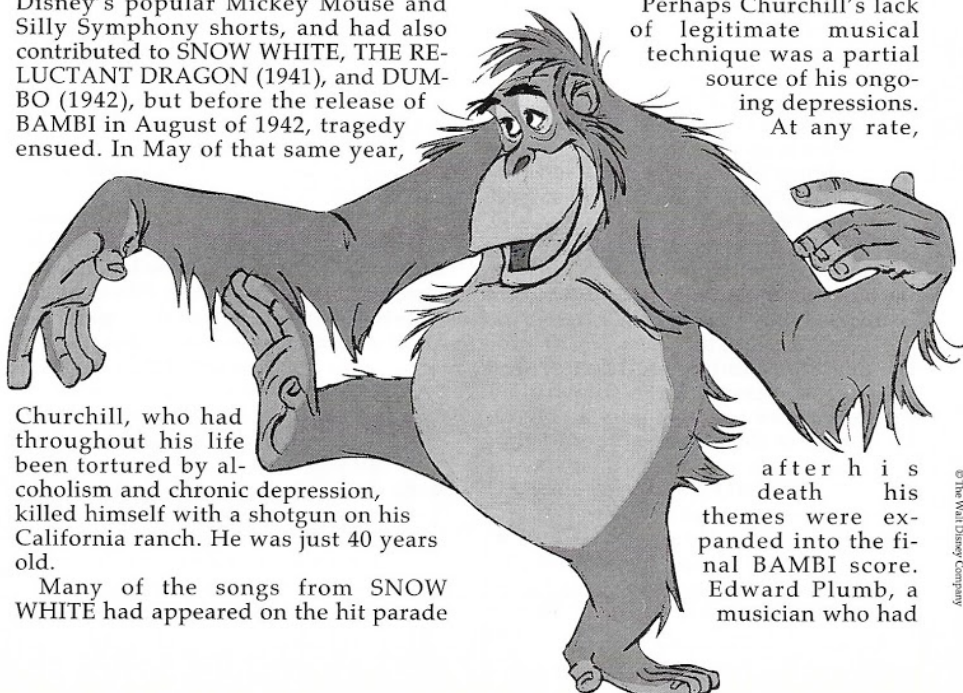
storyteller disc, which downplayed the score under a narration geared for children. But now the new *BAMBI* (and its attendant releases) duplicate the quality with which *SNOW WHITE* and *PINOCCHIO* were produced, and all are remastered as "music only" discs from original source material without the intrusion of any dialogue or sound effects.

BAMBI is the crowning achievement of Disney staff composer Frank Churchill, who, for all the never-ending exposure of his Disney work, is still something less than a household name. Churchill and Leigh Harline (who composed *PINOCCHIO*) were Disney's two original house composers during the pivotal decade of the thirties, and together established the classic sound of the first shorts and features, their still sparsely credited achievements the cornerstone of Disney's musical empire.

Churchill had composed many of Disney's popular Mickey Mouse and Silly Symphony shorts, and had also contributed to *SNOW WHITE*, *THE RELUCTANT DRAGON* (1941), and *DUMBO* (1942), but before the release of *BAMBI* in August of 1942, tragedy ensued. In May of that same year,

at the time of the film's release, and the film also occasioned the first best-selling original soundtrack ever released, a 78rpm set on RCA Victor. By the late thirties, Churchill was said to have developed one of the highest ASCAP ratings of any composer of the period. Associates all concur that Churchill was a tremendously talented, instinctive musician, and a fluent pianist with an amazing capacity for improvisation and melody. He began his career in West Coast jazz bands, moved on to radio and recording work, and got his start in Hollywood by performing live mood-setting music on the sets of silent pictures. Churchill appeared in at least one silent feature, *BEAU BRUMMEL* (1924), with John Barrymore and Mary Astor, and, with the advent of sound, served as a piano accompanist and soloist for RKO Radio Pictures before moving on to Disney's.

Perhaps Churchill's lack of legitimate musical technique was a partial source of his ongoing depressions. At any rate,



after his death his themes were expanded into the final *BAMBI* score. Edward Plumb, a musician who had

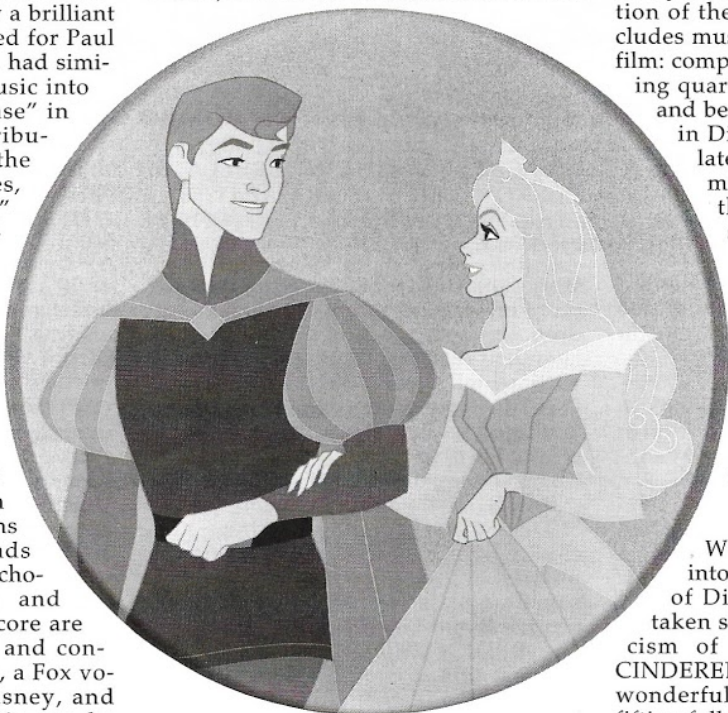
studied at the University of Vienna's Akademis, and who had served as the musical supervisor on *FANTASIA*, headed a staff of composer/arrangers (including Paul Smith and Charles Wolcott) who fashioned Churchill's simple and ineffably moving melodies into one of the finest feature scores of the era. Both "Love Is a Song" and the score itself were nominated for Academy Awards, and Churchill's *DUMBO*, co-composed with the London-born Oliver Wallace, won an Oscar for Best Score. (Earlier, Disney's *PINOCCHIO* won dual Oscars, for Leigh Harline's "When You Wish Upon a Star" as Best Song, and the first Best Score award for Harline's underscoring.) Plumb, primarily a brilliant orchestrator who had arranged for Paul Whiteman and Johnny Green, had similarly developed Harline's music into the modernistic "Whale Chase" in *PINOCCHIO*, and his contributions to *BAMBI* are vital to the film's more violent passages, notably the climactic "Man" and hunt/forest fire sequences, where his sophisticated orchestral style comes to the fore.

Unlike the song-oriented *SNOW WHITE*, the musical emphasis in *BAMBI* is on its background score. While several terse songs are included, the overall accent is on a pantheistic fission of limpidly transparent, often chamber-scaled orchestrations and (wordless) choral sounds similar in effect to the use of chorus in Ravel's "Daphnis and Chloe." Thus crucial to the score are the choral effects arranged and conducted by Charles Henderson, a Fox vocal director borrowed by Disney, and whose work in a similar vein can be heard in *THE GANG'S ALL HERE* (1943), notably the spectacular orchestral/choral "Polka Dot Polka" finale. Alexander Steinert, who worked with both Gershwin and Ravel, provided the sensitive conducting, and also arranged some of the film's opening cues.

The musico/dramatic totality of *BAMBI* remains lodged in the minds of generations of viewers, as few works in any medium so potently run the gamut from sublime idyll to traumatic terror as does Disney's often wrenching saga of nature and the cycle of life. Personally, one of my earliest realizations of the power of cinema is of screaming from the balcony of the Senate Theater in Harrisburg, Pa., in a paroxysm of tears and horrified disbelief as I first experienced the death of Bambi's mother during a late-forties reissue of the film. To me, the experience was virtually a juvenile forerunner of the collective shock felt by audiences first witnessing the shower scene in *PSYCHO* (1960); the shocking "murder" of the gentle, sweet-voiced doe unwittingly psyching me (and no doubt many other impressionable movie-bred moppets of the era) for the equally unbelievable death of Marion

Crane a decade or so later. (Late-period Hitchcock would hold few shocks for staunch survivors of early Disney!)

The enduring emotional impact of *BAMBI* is, of course, reinforced by its score, which likewise melds from transcendent lyricism to abrasive terror, and which, in spite of its collective realization, can finally be traced back to the genius of Frank Churchill. I have explored the collective composition of the *BAMBI* score, a unique process practiced only within the studio system of Golden Age Hollywood, in an essay in the book, *Wonderful Inventions* (Library of Congress, Washington, 1985, Iris Newsom, editor). Much of the article is based on



two original *BAMBI* scores in the Library's Music Division, one a very early preliminary draft in Churchill's own hand, the other the final piano conductor's score sent to the Library for copyrighting. The article also includes (as far as I know) the only published musical excerpts from *BAMBI*. Essentially, Churchill provided the major themes (including songs) throughout the score, but his melodies and motifs were subtly (and in some cases, elaborately) developed by Plumb and his staff.

A key example is the "Man" (hunter) motif. Here, Churchill's simple, yet ominously unforgettable motive functions as a ground bass upon which Plumb builds agitated, passacaglia-like passages which build in intensity to the point of terror. This music is heard three times in *BAMBI*: first when man appears on the meadow early in the film, later in the winter sequences which commence idyllically but end with the death scene, and lastly in the climactic hunt scenes, where it is ultimately developed as an hysteria-inducing *idée fixe*. All three cues build from a statement of Churchill's simple three-chord motive, through Plumb's escalating contrapuntal embellishments

thereon, the first two of which climax with a single gunshot, as if the tension generated can only be released by a non-musical sound. Powerful as the first two "Man" sequences are, Disney saves his most traumatic effects for the final hunt sequence. It opens with a chilling scene in which the horror of the always unseen but relentlessly stalking hunters is presented from the perspective of the terrified birds and small animals hiding in the undergrowth, the tension, along with a relentless musical cue, building unbearably to create one of the most disturbing sequences in early Disney.

While the rare LP remains an excellently edited and engineered compilation of the score, the expanded CD includes music never heard outside of the film: complete sequences from the opening quarter, probably the most idyllic and beautifully designed and scored in Disney, through cues from the later autumn and winter "movements" (as the film moves through its cyclic seasonal structure), and all of the "Man" passages. Of particular interest are cues from the last quarter of the film, including Plumb's music for the stag fight, and hunt/forest fire, not heard on the original LP, and the orchestral details of which are cracklingly brilliant in this new remastering.

Bring on the Girls

With *CINDERELLA*, we move into a later, less intensified period of Disney, almost as if Walt had taken some of the "too intense" criticism of his early work seriously. *CINDERELLA* was the first of Disney's wonderful fairy-tale trilogy of the early fifties, followed by *ALICE IN WONDERLAND* (1951) and *PETER PAN* (1953). By the era of *CINDERELLA* (and actually as early as the mid-forties anthology features), Disney had also entered a new musical phase, one which moved away from his initial reliance on his house composers. Perhaps spurred by the commercial failure of *FANTASIA*, Walt went aggressively Pop in the mid-forties, hiring proven Tin Pan Alley hit-makers to do the songs for his features, while his staff composers were relegated to arranging, background scoring, and development, and sometimes secondary songwriting. (This policy had proved especially successful with *SONG OF THE SOUTH* in 1946.)

Disney had been impressed by Mack David, Jerry Livingston, and Al Hoffman's "Chi-Baba, Chi-Baba," a hit for Peggy Lee in the late forties, and, hoping for a similar nonsensical success (which he got with "Bibbidi-Bobbidi-Boo"), hired the team to create the songs for *CINDERELLA*. The film and songs proved Disney's biggest hits in years, and launched the fifties renaissance of animated features—*ALICE*, *PAN*, and

Continued on page 49



LEFT: The Mad Hatter turns his back discreetly while the March Hare chastises ALICE IN WONDERLAND (1951) during a mad tea party. **RIGHT:** Live-action footage shot to guide Disney artists featured Jerry Colonna and Kathryn Beaumont (the voices of the Hare and Alice).

If hearing isn't enough for you diehard Disneyites, and you prefer to see what all the fuss is about, here's a rundown of some of the animated features currently available on laserdisc:

ALICE IN WONDERLAND (Walt Disney Home Video, \$99.95) was considered by some critics to be a travesty of the Lewis Carroll book and the definitive Sir John Tenniel illustrations, but there's no denying that the 1951 film is splendidly done and voiced to perfection—particularly by Ed Wynn as the Mad Hatter, Jerry Colonna as the March Hare, Richard Haydn as the Caterpillar, Verna Felton as the Queen of Hearts, Bill Thompson as the White Rabbit, and, most eerily, Sterling Holloway as the Cheshire Cat. ("We're all mad here.") The songs, including "A Very Merry Un-birthday" and "Painting the Roses Red," are fine, and the film, despite the criticism leveled at it, captures the logical lunacy of the original. The Exclusive Archive Collection includes storyboards, promotional films, demos of deleted songs, publicity material, a one-hour television special from 1950, a 1951 radio broadcast with Walt Disney and Kathryn Beaumont (the voice of Alice), and a 1923 silent cartoon called **ALICE'S WONDERLAND**.

BAMBI (Walt Disney Home Video, \$29.95), the 1942 animated feature most likely to cause hysteria in young children, has been given a stunning transfer to laser. A short feature included in this 55th Anniversary Limited Edition, **BAMBI: THE MAGIC BEHIND THE MASTERPIECE**, contains some wonderful footage of veteran Disney artists studying deer in order to bring Bambi and family to life.

CINDERELLA (Walt Disney Home Video, \$99.95) comes in a Deluxe CAV Laserdisc Edition that puts many other "special" laser sets to shame. The film itself, with its memorable songs ("A Dream is a Wish Your Heart Makes," "Bibbidi-Bobbidi-Boo") and magic, has received a state-of-the-art transfer. The supplemental material includes a disc featuring a documentary (**THE MAKING OF CINDERELLA**), storyboards, live-action reference footage, a complete Silly Symphony version of the fairy tale, demos for eight unused songs, radio programs and commercials, production photos, a 1950 Sunday comic

strip, a clip from **THE MICKEY MOUSE CLUB**, character designs, layouts, backgrounds, trailers—everything but the kitchen sink Cindy had to scrub and clean. As if that wasn't enough, the box comes with an exclusive lithograph and a book called *Cinderella: A Dream Come True*. (A special delight is a photo of voice artist Eleanor Audley hamming it up in costume as the Wicked Stepmother.) For partisans of **CINDERELLA**, one of the most popular of the Disney features, this box is a dream come true in itself.

DUMBO (Walt Disney Video, \$49.95) comes with no such extras in its Masterpiece Collection edition, but it certainly deserves them: the 1941 film, turned out quickly to bring some cash into the seriously-strapped studio after the financial failure of **FANTASIA** (1940), is one of Disney's enduring classics, its cartoonish energy a refreshing contrast to the realism later achieved in **BAMBI**. It has some great songs, too, including "Pink Elephants on Parade" (one of the studio's most surreal sequences) and "When I See an Elephant Fly," a number sung by three crows (one of them voiced by Cliff Edwards, the original voice of Jiminy Cricket). Disney voice regulars Sterling Holloway and Verna Felton are joined by character actor Edward Brophy, beloved by mystery fans as Morelli in **THE THIN MAN** (1934) and by horror fans as Rollo in **MAD LOVE** (1935), as Timothy Mouse, a rodent who can lick his weight in Mickeys.

THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME (Walt Disney Video, \$99.95) was a disappointment at the box office, but there is no doubt that it will ultimately take its place as one of the studio's greatest classics. The Deluxe CAV Widescreen Edition does the film full justice, as does the supplemental material, which includes **THE MAKING OF THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME**, an early presentation reel, three deleted songs by Alan Menken and Stephen Schwartz, trailers, a multi-language clip reel, a history and background of the Victor Hugo novel, and the usual plethora of lush Disney artwork. Tom Hulce does touching work as the voice of Quasimodo, and receives fine support from Tony Jay, Demi Moore, Kevin Kline, Jason Alexander, Charles Kimbrough, and the late, great Mary Wickes. The film's songs are all worthy of

Disney on Laser

by
Richard
Valley

Broadway, which, rumor has it, is exactly where THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME is headed.

THE JUNGLE BOOK (Walt Disney Video, \$29.95) is available in a 30th Anniversary Fully Restored Limited Edition (how many different names does Disney have for its boxed sets?), and the CAV feature's lush jungle backgrounds benefit greatly from the restoration work. This was the last animated feature to actually receive the magic touch of Walt Disney himself, and it seems to get better and better with each passing year. The four vultures based on the Beatles are admittedly dated, but the jungle jazz provided by Phil Harris and Louis Prima in the number "I Wan'na Be Like You" is timeless fun, as is Harris' solo of "The Bare Necessities." As the voice of the villainous tiger, Shere Khan, George Sanders lends a touch of smug sophistication to the primitive setting, and is well-matched in dirty doings by the inevitable Sterling Holloway as Kaa, the snake. Disney, who always had a weakness for bare-ass jokes (witness the cheeky cherubim in FANTASIA and the opening shot of 1960's POLLYANNA), obviously had a hand in young Mowgli's occasional near-loss of his loincloth, but the wolf-boy manages to retain his dignity and is pleasantly voiced by Bruce Reitherman, young son of Wolf Reitherman, the film's director. The laser release's supplemental material includes the theatrical trailer, artists Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston discussing character animation, and the featurette THE JUNGLE BOOK—THE MAKING OF A MUSICAL MASTERPIECE.

THE LION KING (Walt Disney Video, \$124.95) comes to us in a Deluxe CAV Letterbox Edition. We're still in the underbrush, but it's 27 years since THE JUNGLE BOOK and Uncle Walt is long gone. The 1994 film was incredibly popular at the box office, but it doesn't hold a candle to the financially disappointing but artistically superior HUNCHBACK, and its Elton

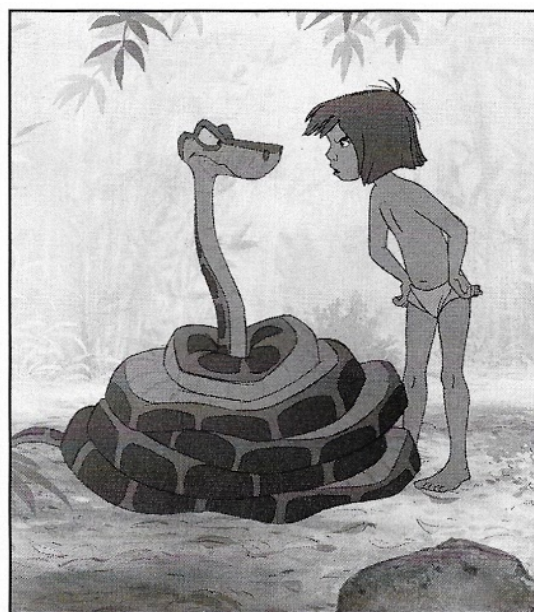
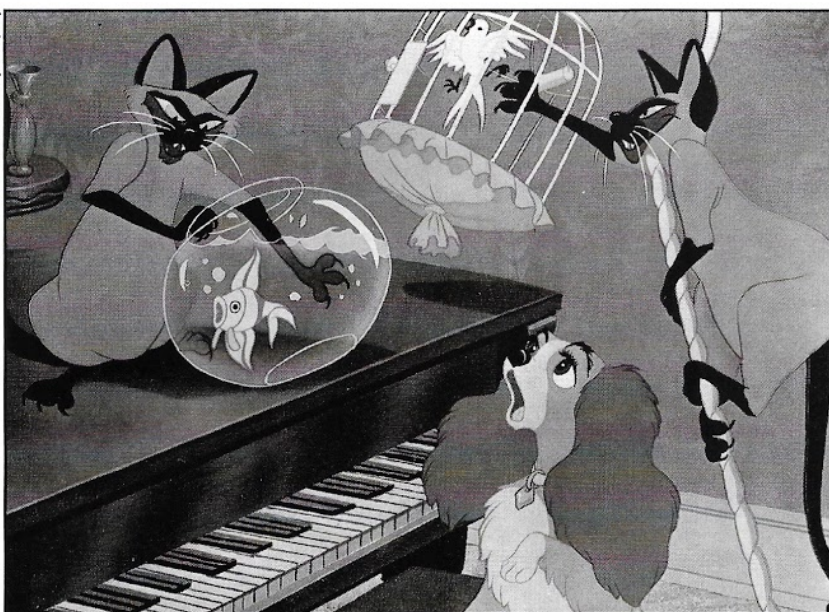
John/Tim Rice score isn't equal to the work of Alan Menken and the late Howard Ashman on THE LITTLE MERMAID (1989), BEAUTY AND THE BEAST (1991), and ALADDIN (1992). Still, if you're a fan of the film, this is the way to look at it. The extras include a portfolio of concept art lithographs, the expected THE MAKING OF THE LION KING, storyboards, character designs, and audio commentary by producer Don Hahn and directors Rob Minkoff and Roger Allers. And there's no arguing with success: the stage version of THE LION KING is currently one of the most popular musicals on the Great White Way.

SLEEPING BEAUTY (Walt Disney Video, \$99.95), like HUNCHBACK, is a Deluxe CAV Widescreen Edition. The fully-restored fairy tale has probably not looked this beautiful since its original 1959 release, if indeed it looked this good then, and its lush pictorials are matched by stunning stereophonic sound. The extra material makes it clear that this film, unlike the majority of the studio's work, was the inspiration of one artist alone: Eyvind Earle. Also in this set: ONCE UPON A DREAM—THE MAKING OF SLEEPING BEAUTY, concept art, character designs, storyboard sequences, live-action reference, a comparison of the widescreen and pan-and-scan versions, a segment with live-action model Helen Stanley from THE MICKEY MOUSE CLUB, a segment from the DISNEYLAND TV show called "The Peter Tchaikovsky Story" (starring Grant Williams in the title role, though he's best known to Scarlet Streeters as THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN), publicity material, trailers, and a fascinating short subject called 4 ARTISTS PAINT 1 TREE. (The artists include Eyvind Earle.) Best of all, the box includes the Oscar-winning short subject, GRAND CANYON, which was released on the same bill as SLEEPING BEAUTY.



Phil Harris and Sebastian Cabot provided the voices for Baloo the Bear and Bagheera the panther in THE JUNGLE BOOK (1967), the last Disney animated feature to get the personal attention of Walt himself.





LEFT: Not every Disney critter was cute and adorable, as evidenced by *LADY AND THE TRAMP*'s Si and Am (voiced by Peggy Lee, who also wrote the film's score). **RIGHT:** Another snake in the grass was *THE JUNGLE BOOK*'s Kaa, voiced by Disney regular Sterling Holloway.

MUSIC VAULT

Continued from page 46

LADY AND THE TRAMP—all of which, while lacking the primal force and intense horrific edge of the first efforts, still represent a peak of lush, popuxe design and color styling, and fluid, profligate virtuosity of character animation. *CINDERELLA* was also Disney's first cohesive full-length animated film since the pastiche features that followed *BAMBI* in 1942, and is a brilliant study in story development, the screenplay imparting much tension and suspense to a plot, the outcome of which virtually every member of the audience knows before even entering the theater. Particularly exemplary of *CINDERELLA*'s ongoing tension and release strategies is the middle section of the film, in which Cinderella's friends, the musically-inclined mice and birds, do a makeover on her old dress, only to have their creation destroyed in the traumatic sequence in which the stepsisters attack Cinderella and rip it to shreds, a shocking bit of business for this otherwise mild-mannered period. (Nonetheless, Disney's wicked stepmother is a study in subtle malevolence, a kind of animated Mrs. Danvers, while the drolly malicious Lucifer gets his final comeuppance in a *VERTIGO* terror-death from which the fat feline apparently does not rise again!)

CINDERELLA's songs remain charming, and the story's fantasy and drama are well rendered in the orchestral music of Wallace and Smith. The underscore is well-represented on CD, notably the dress episode and its ensuing transition into the lush Fairy Godmother scenes, which in turn lead to the ball sequence and its wild coach-ride home. The CD as a whole reveals a (for me) previously unappreciated power and lyricism, notably in the earnest scoring for the film's somber, almost *CITIZEN*

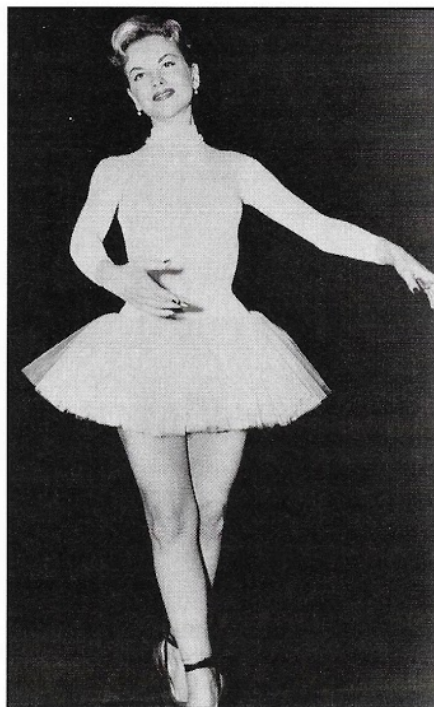
KANE-like prologue. Also highly effective are the orchestrations which emphasize the higher, lighter registers of the orchestra, especially the witty use of woodwinds in the cat-and-mouse cues. All is sparkingly reproduced. The disc is also welcome as a rare recorded example of the vocal talents of radio singer Ilene Woods: as the voice of Cinderella, Woods brings a freshness and sexy, spunky sweetness to the Disney heroine that is unrivaled to this day.

As *BAMBI* marked the end of an era for Disney, so, in a different way, did *SLEEPING BEAUTY*, which was Disney's last-ditch attempt to resuscitate the power and wonder of his first features. It was also an attempt to bring the fairy tale into the future, fifties-style. Shot in wide-screen (Technirama), the ornate West Coast Gothic look of the film was designed by California artist, Eyvind Earle, the sole instance of one artist's style so dominating the look of any Disney film. (The recent *POCAHONTAS* somewhat aped the Earle look of *SLEEPING BEAUTY*.) A highlight of the rather angular goings-on is the character of Maleficent, the evil fairy whose curse motivates the plot. Maleficent is the last of the serious, "means business" Disney villainesses: a svelte, blue-skinned relative of the Wicked Queen in *SNOW WHITE*, here updated with a bit of high-camp posturing and sardonic irony (not to mention cheekbones to die for). Disney's artists also lavished some of their most fantastic designs on her domain (a picturesquely crumbling Gothic fortress rendered in bilious shades of green), and created some of their most spectacular (and futuristic) animation and effects for her climactic assault on the Prince. (The cosmic cloudscape that backs up Maleficent's final fury looks like an anticipation of the finale of the recent *CONTACT*.) Just prior to her transformation into a gigan-

tic fire-breathing dragon, audiences in 1959 knew they were into a new phase of Disney when the irate sorceress shrieked: "Now shall you deal with me, oh Prince, and all the powers of Hell!" (Maybe, as kids in 1959, the aforementioned Baptists were collectively traumatized by this innovative sequence, and just never got over it!)

The score for this alternately romantic/Gothic tale is based on themes from Tchaikovsky's "Sleeping Beauty" ballet, as adapted by George Bruns, a second-string studio musician. Bruns landed the plum feature assignment primarily on the strength of his having composed, for a *DISNEYLAND* "Frontierland" episode, a somewhat trivial tune that just happened to launch one of the legendary pop culture fads of the fifties, "The Ballad of Davy Crockett." (Aficionados of the bizarre might check out Tim Curry's wonderful psychotronic version of the Crockett Ballad on Disney Records' recent *MUSIC FROM THE PARK* CD. This very nineties collection also includes a rendition of the Haunted Mansion's "Grim Grinning Ghosts" by the Barenaked Ladies, a male group who perhaps place a slight emphasis on the lyrics "grim grinning ghosts come out!")

Oddly, the orchestral tracks for *SLEEPING BEAUTY* were originally recorded (in three-track stereo) in a state-of-the-art studio in Berlin (behind the Iron Curtain at that time), while the vocals were recorded in Hollywood. (Aurora, Beauty herself, is voiced by Mary Costa, a legitimate singer who would eventually essay the role of *VANESSA* when Samuel Barber's revised version of his American grand opera was revived at the old Met.) The two sets of tracks were then mixed into the wide-screen film's final stereophonic tracks. It was this combination of original elements that producer Randy Thornton drew upon for this newly expanded CD. The



The Three Faces of SLEEPING BEAUTY: Opera star Mary Costa (Left) provided the voice and dancer Helene Stanley (Right) supplied the movement for the animated incarnation of the Princess Aurora.

music sounds great in this lushly remastered stereo version, especially the choral/orchestra passages, and, while lacking the psychological intensity of *BAMBI*, the *BEAUTY* score is not without glossy charm and plenty of Gothic melodrama. Finally, however (like the film itself), *SLEEPING BEAUTY*'s score remains lyrical but cool and dispassionate, an odd effect considering the fire and passion of the Tchaikovsky original.

Talent Roundup

Three additional animated soundtracks, *DUMBO*, *LADY AND THE TRAMP*, and *THE JUNGLE BOOK*, and a new *MARY POPPINS* CD were released this summer. *DUMBO* is a further example of Frank Churchill's beguiling melodic gifts, though Oliver Wallace worked on the score as well, contributing two songs, including the trippy "Pink Elephants on Parade" with its spacey solo Novachord passages. The score as a whole is a wonderful fusion of poignant lyricism and circus music, all tempered with a Paul Whitemanesque thirties ebullience. Wallace also served as musical director/score composer for *LADY AND THE TRAMP*, arranging the somewhat bland songs of Sonny Burke and Peggy Lee. The score does have its vocal moments, notably the droll "Siamese Cat Song" and Lee's star turn as the sexy Peke, Peg, singing "He's a Tramp" (one of the more outrageous pieces of Disney character animation of the period). Indeed, Disney's superficially innocent tale of canine love is, on close examination, the story of a naive innocent who spends the night with an experienced charmer, only to rudely find out she's one of a long line! Wallace's wonderful (and little known) underscoring is a highlight of this new CD. (Certain cog-

noscenti obviously do know Wallace's work: his perky motif for Lady, the Cocker Spaniel of the title, was "paraphrased," pretty much note for note, by Danny Elfman in 1985 for a sequence in *PEE WEE'S BIG ADVENTURE*.) Like the *CINDERELLA* disc, *LADY AND THE TRAMP* reveals a wealth of lovely (and previously unrecorded) cues, unusual in that most are not based extensively on the song melodies, and reveals Wallace's expressive underscoring as an unexpected delight.

Disney Records promises two further releases soon, the never-released soundtrack to Disney's cult favorite, *ALICE IN WONDERLAND*, and the ensuing installment in Walt's early fifties Anglophile period, *PETER PAN*, both collectively scored song-wise, but also prime examples of the distinctive underscoring of Wallace, who emerged as Disney's key staff animated feature composer in the early fifties. (Wallace also composed the wonderful "Headless Horseman" sequence for *ICHABOD AND MR. TOAD* from 1949).

The sixties, the era of the Sherman Brothers, is not my fave classic Disney era, but the *MARY POPPINS* songs hold up well, and *JUNGLE BOOK* exudes an almost touching aura of geriatric hip, especially when considered in the context of the rockadelic sixties. Both CDs include a Sherman Brothers interview along with several demo recordings. The retro mood of *JUNGLE BOOK* is enhanced by the film's voices, among them Phil Harris and Louis Prima. The Prima/Harris duo, "I Wanna Be Like You," is a strong rhythm number with a very cool beat that brings both scat and the great Prima "Call of the Wildest" Vegas tradition into the sixties. (The only thing missing is Keely Smith!) A different as-

pect of the decade is evoked in the Liverpudlian voices of the vultures in the "We're Your Friends" number. Terry Gilkyson, who wrote "Memories Are Made of This" and a number of other fifties hits (and appeared as a ballad singer in the 1961 Western, *POSSE FROM HELL*) contributed "The Bare Necessities." (Gilkyson created the first songs for *JUNGLE BOOK* before the concept of the film was revised by Disney in its early stages of production.)

In addition to these discs, Disney Records has released Leopold Stokowski's *FANTASIA* tracks in a two-CD set, complete with the original filmtrack's bizarre mixing and spatial effects, thus making all of the first five Disney feature scores available on CD.

All of these are beautifully done, and present the most complete versions of these scores yet issued. Personally, I'd rank them with the best classic original soundtrack reissues of the digital era (notably, the recent Rhino MGM musicals CDs). Most include outtake song demos, and the remastering, especially considering the age of some of the source material, is remarkably quiet and well-defined. Producers Thornton and Ted Krczko are obviously devoted fans of classic Disney music, and are to be congratulated for making so much of it available on CD. (Thornton and Krczko also compiled the recent series of four "Classic Disney" CDs, which chronicle Disney music from the thirties up to the nineties, and Thornton produced the great boxed set of Annette vocals.)

Actually, the only real disappointment about these new soundtrack releases are the liner notes (or lack thereof). Perhaps in an attempt to present these scores in

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Hail to the Master

Robert Wise

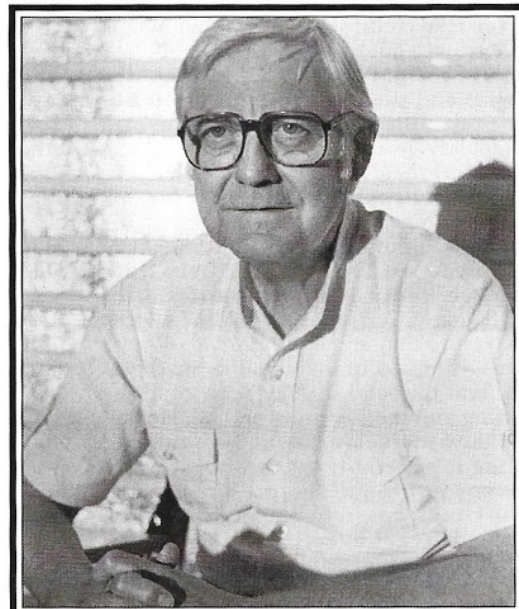
interviewed by Kevin G. Shinnick



You'll search far and wide to find another filmmaker as versatile as Robert Wise. The director's filmography spans everything from horror movies (1963's *THE HAUNTING*) to blockbuster musicals (1965's *THE SOUND OF MUSIC*).

Wise began his career as an editor, working on such pictures as *THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE* (1939), *THE DEVIL AND DANIEL WEBSTER* (1941), and that perennial list-topper of best films, *CITIZEN KANE* (1941).

In *Scarlet Street* #25, we covered Wise's work on *THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL* (1951). This issue, we step back in time to discuss his first efforts, working with the famous Val Lewton unit on such timeless films as *THE CURSE OF THE CAT PEOPLE* (1944), *MADEMOISELLE FIFI* (1944), and *THE BODY SNATCHER* (1945) . . .



Robert Wise: I've done 39 films in my career. Of course, the two best known are *WEST SIDE STORY* and *THE SOUND OF MUSIC*, but *THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL* was the third best known, both here and abroad.

Scarlet Street: You seem to jump from one genre to another.

RW: Yes, right. I don't have a favorite genre; I like to mix my palette. I'd hate to do the same genre film all the time. I don't have a favorite genre, but I have two unfavorites. One is a Western—I haven't done a Western or considered one since the mid-fifties. The Old West had been overdone in films, and television was running so many Western series that I decided I didn't want to look at any more Westerns. The other was spectacles. I made my one venture into spectacles in Rome with *HELEN OF TROY*. That was a genre I particularly didn't care for, so I've never considered anything else.

SS: No matter what the genre, the human element seems more important to you than spectacle or special effects.

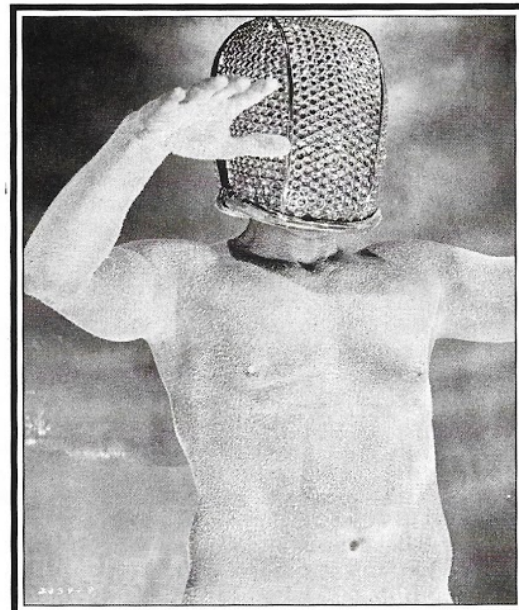
RW: Yes, of course. The actors, the story, the plot—that has to be good, even if you have the greatest locations in the world or the greatest special effects in the world. If the plot and characters don't interest you, don't grab and hold you, you can have the greatest look in the world and it won't get the audience. The play's the thing—the story, the plot, the characters you develop.

SS: What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the name Val Lewton?

RW: Oh, I love that man so much, and I owe him so much, too, because he started me directing. I've worked with some other creative producers—John Houseman, particularly—but Lewton was the most creative producer I ever worked with.

SS: He was a very well-educated man.

RW: Very well educated. He had written several books, romantic adventure stories, before he was 21. I don't think there's one of his films—and he made about eight horror films—that he didn't do the final shooting script himself, but he would





never take credit for it in his own name. When we got down to *THE BODY SNATCHER*, Philip McDonald was the writer and did the original script. But when the film was done, the union said somebody else's name had to go on, too, that McDonald didn't do enough. They forced Val to put his name on, so he took a pen name: Carlos Keith. One of his books was put out under that name, so when you see *THE BODY SNATCHER*, you see Philip McDonald and Carlos Keith—and Carlos Keith is Val Lewton. Val just had so much input to all of these films—the look of the film, the photography and the sets, and the actors and the casting and the costumes and all. He had so many marvelous ideas without ever trying to supercede the director. He was the greatest supporter of a director that you could possibly imagine. He just wanted to get everything the best he could for his films, and that's how he got such marvelous quality in those low-budget pictures.

SS: Val Lewton was supportive, but nevertheless he replaced the original director of *CURSE OF THE CAT PEOPLE*, Gunther von Fritsch, with you.

RW: Well, those were the days when the studios were making a lot of B pictures. They were making 60 features a year, maybe 40 of them were low budget, not necessarily low quality. Mark Robson, who had been my assistant at one time, had started by editing Val's earliest picture, *CAT PEOPLE*. After editing three of Val's films, Mark had been given a chance to direct by Lewton. I was hoping to get that same kind of avenue, and I was assigned to be the editor on *CURSE OF THE CAT PEOPLE*. That's how I had happened to come into the picture. *CURSE* was the first feature film for a Gunther von Fritsch, who was a fine documentary filmmaker. They weren't unhappy with his work, but he was terribly slow. They couldn't make him understand that this was a low cost, short scheduled film, and he couldn't go fast enough. By the time he had used all of

his schedule up, he had only shot half of the script! Well, they knew I'd been wanting a chance to direct, so I was simply called in by Val Lewton on a Saturday noon. I was told to go over to the lunchroom to see him, and he said, "Listen, we're going to have to make a change here. You've been wanting a chance, so we want you to take over Monday morning." That was it.

SS: Does a lot of von Fritsch's footage still remain in the film?

RW: Oh, yes, sure—practically all of his film's in there. It's a little hard for me at this juncture to remember what I shot and what he shot. I had the big advantage, because I knew the film. I knew all the actors, because I'd visit the set, so it was not a terribly big challenge for me.

SS: Though there are two directors, the film appears seamless. It's impossible to tell where he stopped off and you began.

RW: Of course, we had the same actors, we had the same cinematographer—so everything just went along and there wasn't a break in the shooting at all. He'd finished his shooting on Saturday night and I took over on Monday morning, so it's not so surprising that all the elements were the same. It'd be surprising if you could tell the difference between the two directors.

SS: Whose idea was it to have the Christmas carolers, with Simone Simon singing the French carol in counterpoint?

RW: Lewton's, I imagine.

SS: You also directed Simone Simon in *MADMOISELLE FIFI*.

RW: Yes, a very interesting film. Here we are again with Lewton—that was his idea. He got the idea of taking the two De Maupassant stories "The Little Laundress" and "Mademoiselle Fifi" and putting them together. I wouldn't be surprised if he'd even written an outline for the script writers to use.

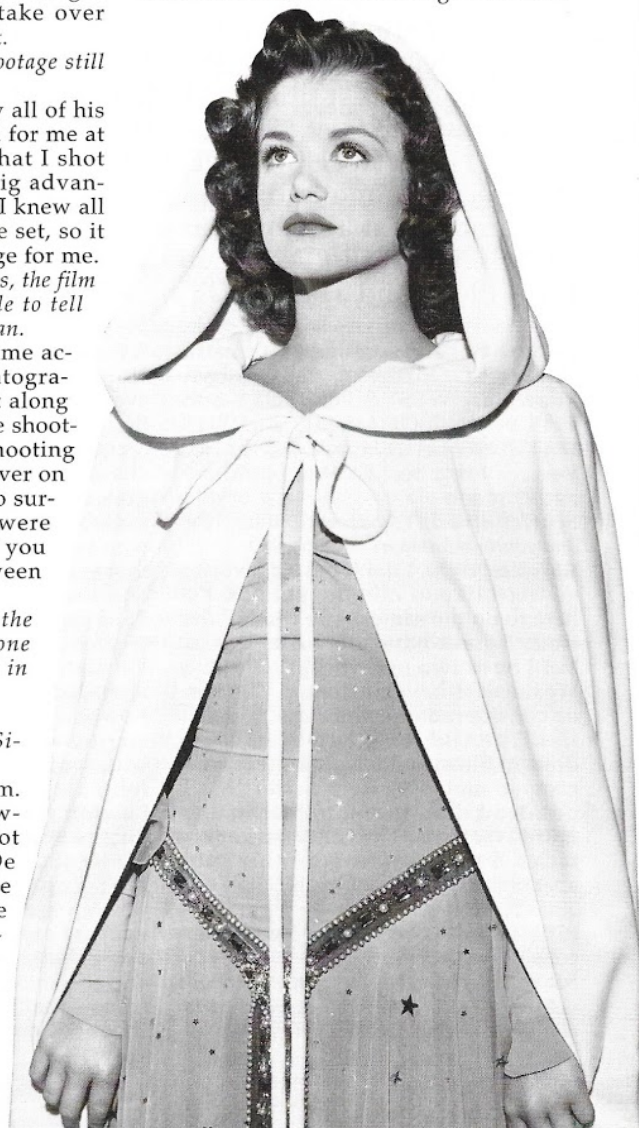
PREVIOUS PAGE: Susan Hayward in her Oscar-winning performance in *I WANT TO LIVE* (1958), Robert Wise hard at work at his desk, and James Olson in the sci-fi classic *THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN* (1971). **LEFT:** Amy and her father (Ann Carter and Kent Smith) approach the "magic mailbox" in the Val Lewton production *THE CURSE OF THE CAT PEOPLE* (1944). **BELOW:** "Cat woman" Irena (Simone Simon) answers Amy's wish for a friend.

SS: There are some marvelous period touches for such a low-budget film.

RW: Once again, I have to say Lewton should get so much credit. I never thought of this, because I hadn't been directing that long, but when we got to going into the look of the film and the costumes and the characters, he said, "Let's get some Daumier prints out." We got the ideas for the costumes, for the look of the characters, all from Daumier.

SS: Most producers would have just pulled what they had from stock.

RW: He would stretch it. He had a great facility, Val Lewton; all of his small budget films had a marvelous look about them. And the production values—he would look around the studio and see what sets were left standing. It used to

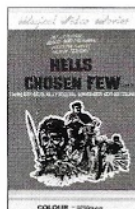


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be in the studios—and maybe it still is, today—that, if you had a big interior of a house, for instance, they'd keep that as a standing set. Different films would come in and use it, changing it, repainting it . . . Val would always watch for those things. One the films he made is called *GHOST SHIP*. Well, there had been a bigger picture, kind of a medium budget picture made about a freighter. They had a big set of the boat, the decks, the cabins . . . and Val walked by one day and saw us sitting there. He said, "Hey, that's a good part of production," and cooked up the idea of *GHOST SHIP*!

SS: Two of the best performances in *CURSE OF THE CAT PEOPLE* were those of Julia Dean and Elizabeth Russell.

RW: Oh, yes! Weren't they marvelous together? There was something quite offbeat about that relationship—it was very interesting. I don't know whether Lewton quite knew what he had. By the way, Elizabeth lives right around me here. She lives on South Beverly Drive, two or three blocks away. She will call me once in a while. She came over once, two or three years ago, and I saw her.

SS: Naturally, we have to ask you about two other actors of some note: Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi. They were in *THE BODY SNATCHER* together.

RW: Yes, they were. I'm going to tell you one thing: the original script didn't have the Lugosi character in it. The studio front office said, "Wouldn't it be great if we could advertise Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi in this film, so we twisted Lewton's arm and Val created that character for Lugosi, the porter there at the doctor's place. Now, as you've probably heard, Karloff was such a marvelous gentleman. He was very well educated—well read, soft spoken, very articulate—not at all like the monster man who appeared on the screen. I got to know Karloff and his family, but Lugosi, I didn't get to know to any extent. Lugosi was not feeling well during the making of *THE BODY SNATCHER*. Later, I found out he had been on drugs, so maybe he

was on drugs when I worked with him. He was off-center and I kind of had to nurse him through the part, to help him through it. I must say, I give Boris a lot of credit. He was very patient with Lugosi and worked with him and didn't get upset when we had little problems. I don't remember what the problems were, specifically, but I do remember that I had to take it very easy with him.

SS: Lugosi played a scene in which he was actually under water. That must have been difficult, considering his health.

RW: Yes, that's true, but he was not under there very long.

SS: Karloff gives one of his finest performances in *THE BODY SNATCHER*.

RW: Boris himself was not well at the time. He was having back problems, but you wouldn't know it—he was there because he wanted this opportunity to show he could act. He never complained, but I could see him wince every once in a while, and he would favor his back when he had a chance. He was so keen about making the film. He felt this would be a good chance, because of the nature of the story and the marvelous duel scenes he had with Henry Daniell, who was such a marvelous, famous character actor. Boris recognized that this would be his opportunity to show that he could hold his own as an actor. He didn't just need to be the monster man to be in films and be successful.

SS: The interesting thing about Karloff's character, Gray, is that, although he's a murderous villain, he also does a lot of good. He's the conscience of Dr. MacFarlane, Henry Daniell's character.

RW: Yes. There were so many levels to it. I think that was one of the things that intrigued me most about *THE BODY SNATCHER*.

SS: Henry Daniell was sort of a cold fish in his film roles. Was he really like that?

RW: Yes, a little bit. I got to know Boris much better, and felt closer to him than I did to Henry. Sometimes actors will keep an attitude and a feeling in order to keep in character, you know? Maybe

Henry was like that. I don't know that I ever saw Henry away from the studio. I don't know that I ever met his wife or that we went out together. I did that with Boris and his wife, but Henry was a bit stand-offish—which was just right for the character.

SS: One of the most famous scenes in *THE BODY SNATCHER* is the murder of the blind street singer, which happens entirely off-camera.

RW: Oh, yes, yes—with the horse and carriage going down through the ally in the darkness and all that.

SS: Do you feel that movies are too graphic today?

RW: Oh, I think so, yes. They want to show too much. Val Lewton's theory was that the greatest fear that people have is fear of the unknown. "What's that in the shadows? Do you see that in the shadows? What's that noise? Do you hear that noise?" That's what he played on a lot—suggestion, like the sequence you mentioned, with the singer on the way into the dark and the horse and carriage following her, and her voice suddenly stopping. That was Lewton's idea, by the way.

SS: When we see the girl's body later, we hear an echo of the song she was singing on the soundtrack. Did you work closely with the composer, Roy Webb?

RW: Roy Webb was under contract to our unit. Max Steiner was actually the head of the RKO music department, but Roy did the smaller pictures. He worked with the producer and myself.

SS: The final scene—the struggling with the dead body in the runaway carriage—is one of the most famous in horror films.

RW: That was difficult to do, to get it just right. Timing was very important. What you do with those scenes is you make dry runs on them, try to get all the camera angles worked out and the action worked out. Then it's pretty well set before you actually put the effects in, like the rain and such. I imagine we did it in

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LEFT: Bela Lugosi's role in *THE BODY SNATCHER* (1945) was written especially for him, the better to increase the film's success at the box office. It teamed him for the last time with Boris Karloff and the first (and last) time with Henry Daniell. **RIGHT:** Fettes (Russell Wade) approaches Cabman Gray (Karloff) for help.





After the box-office success of CAT PEOPLE (1942), RKO asked Val Lewton for a sequel, with the lurid title THE CURSE OF THE CAT PEOPLE. As usual, RKO restricted Lewton to a \$150,000 budget and a running time of less than 75 minutes. Scripter DeWitt Bodeen credited Lewton with the concept and the final draft of the screenplay. According to S. S. Prawer (*Caligari's Children: The Film as Tale of Terror*, Oxford U. Press, 1980), cinematographer Nicholas Musuraca used his atmospheric lighting to disguise "the cheapness of the set in a cramped corner of the studio" when shooting began on August 26, 1943.

When the original director, Gunther Von Fritsch, shot only half the movie within the 18-day schedule, Lewton recommended that Robert Wise, then an RKO film editor with no experience as a feature director, take over. (RKO gave out that Fritsch left because he'd been drafted.) In a 1991 interview with Edmund G. Bansak (*Fearing the Dark: The Val Lewton Career*, McFarland, 1995), Wise said, "They were happy enough with his rushes, but they just couldn't afford to let him go on at that rate . . . Maybe I did do a little more than half the film, but . . . we didn't have to reshoot any of THE CURSE OF THE CAT PEOPLE." Wise wrapped up on October 4, 1943.

THE CURSE OF THE CAT PEOPLE opened to mixed reviews in March 1944. Despite all the problems, Lewton had produced an intriguing, original psychological study with elements of horror and film noir. William K. Everson says (in *Classics of the Horror Film*, Citadel, 1974), "THE CURSE OF THE CAT PEOPLE was handicapped with the double misfortune of a title that tried to pass off a fairy story as a horror yarn, and by being touted as a sequel to the original CAT PEOPLE. As such, it could hardly fail to disappoint the traditional horror fanciers, nor could it reach

those who would most appreciate it, and its distribution was slight. It is really only the vaguest kind of sequel to the original." Several reviewers revised their negative first impressions, including James Agee, who later named THE CURSE OF THE CAT PEOPLE as one of the two best films of 1944 (*The Nation*, January 20, 1945). Most critics agree with Everson that THE CURSE OF THE CAT PEOPLE "contains neither curses nor cat people . . ." However, a "curse" of sorts does connect this movie directly to the previous one.

In CAT PEOPLE, Oliver Reed (Kent Smith) fell in love with Serbian-born Irena Dubrovna (Simone Simon). She refused to consummate the marriage, because she believed that, due to a hereditary curse, passion could turn her into a killer she-cat. Oliver and his oh-so-sympathetic coworker Alice (Jane Randolph) rejected this superstition, until Irena mauled her psychiatrist to death, then was killed by a black panther that she released from the zoo.

In THE CURSE OF THE CAT PEOPLE (with Smith, Simon, and Randolph reprising their roles), Oliver and Alice, now married, live in the prosperous suburb of Tarrytown. Oliver builds elaborate model ships in his tidy workshop. Alice governs her efficient Jamaican servant, Edward (played with dignified charm by calypso singer Sir Lancelot) in her shipshape household. Yet the Reeds have built their stable-looking foundation over a sinkhole of pathology. The most obvious symptom: all the local children despise the Reeds' angelic-looking kindergartner, Amy (convincingly played by seven-year-old Ann Carter).

In her loneliness, Amy seeks out Mrs. Farren (delightful Julia Dean; Val Lewton's eccentric aunt, actress Alla Nazimova, may have inspired the character) and her grim daughter, Barbara (Elizabeth Russell, in a chilling perfor-



PREVIOUS PAGE: Amy Reed (Ann Carter) is comforted by her "friend," Irena (Simone Simon). **LEFT:** The main subplot of *THE CURSE OF THE CAT PEOPLE* (1944) concerns the unhappy Farrens, daughter Barbara (Elizabeth Russell) and Julia (Julia Dean), the mother who refuses to accept the young woman as her own child. **RIGHT:** Redolent of *CURSE*'s bleak atmosphere, Julia dies without ever acknowledging her daughter.

mance; she played a different character in *CAT PEOPLE*, a feline "sister" of Irena, with her voice dubbed by Simone Simon). These misfits live in the neighborhood "haunted house," an old green mansion that becomes Amy's pagan retreat from her rigidly civilized parents.

Mrs. Farren calls Barbara "that liar, that imposter," in the deranged belief that her real daughter died at age six (Amy's age). The retired actress, whose grotesque Victorian decor includes a stuffed cat with a dead bird in its mouth, treats Amy to a scary performance of the local "Legend of Sleepy Hollow," the headless horseman tale. Over the course of several visits, Barbara grows so insanely jealous of Amy that eventually she threatens, "If that child comes here again, I'll kill her!"

Meanwhile, Amy's parents seem oddly distanced, not only from their daughter, but from each other. Obsessed with cleanliness and order, they communicate poorly. Oliver meticulously crafts a model ship for his six-year-old. Amy stares solemnly at this "look but don't touch" adult gift as if it's her duty to be grateful and, by God, she'll manage it. The Reeds try hard to be good, while rarely feeling good. Wishing on the "magic" ring Mrs. Farren gives her, the lonely child conjures a companion that only she can see.

In a parent/teacher conference called after Amy slaps a classmate for inadvertently killing her "friend," a butterfly, Oliver complains, "Amy has too many fancies and too few friends, and it worries me."

The teacher, Miss Callahan (Eve March), says, "Part of the blame for that may lie with you. Perhaps you're over-anxious, watch her too closely, worry too much."

Later, when Alice and Oliver look at Amy's unskilled but creative drawing, Alice suggests that Oliver resents Amy's imagination. He denies it. "It's something else, something moody, something sickly. She could almost be Irena's child." This monumentally insensitive remark comes out sounding as though he fantasizes that, if Irena had survived, the two of them might have created this beautiful girl together.

Alice bristles, "But she's not Irena's child! There's nothing of Irena in her! She's my child!" Oliver explains that he only means he's afraid that Amy will go insane, the way Irena did. (Both Reeds are now in denial that anything genuinely supernatural happened to Irena; however, the ambiguity of *CAT PEOPLE* allows for this interpretation.) Alice says, "I'm not a jealous woman, Oliver. That's why I can tell you that you think too much about Irena, blame yourself too much for her death." But Alice is jealous, threatened by Oliver's memories.

After finding some old photographs, including several of the late she-cat, Amy names her invisible friend Irena. Alice suggests that Oliver should throw those pictures away, so that nobody will have to explain them to the child. The viewer might suspect another motive. No second wife would like to imagine her husband dwelling on fond memories of wife number one.

In private, Oliver burns most of the pictures, but gazes longingly at one of him and Irena together. He saves it in an album, in a drawer in the living room. Later, when Alice takes out the album, the photo falls to the floor.

Amy picks up the picture, identifies Irena as her playmate, then shows the photo to Alice and wonders how her father knows "my friend." Soon, Amy's friend (Simone Simon) becomes visible to the viewer. Amy, who doesn't know the "catwoman" story, perceives Irena as a harmless, loving companion. Like a pagan goddess, Irena gives the landscape an ethereal sparkle.

Composer Roy Webb's reuse of themes from his *CAT PEOPLE* score links the two movies in ways that the audience may not notice consciously. For instance, a menacing theme from *CAT PEOPLE* becomes Irena's gentle lullaby to Amy in *THE CURSE OF THE CAT PEOPLE*. This familiar but altered music encourages the viewer to see Irena as more than imaginary. In a transformation familiar from werewolf movies, death has released Irena from her werecat curse. Maybe she's a benevolent ghost on a mission to redeem herself by helping a troubled little girl. As Phil Hardy points out (in *The Encyclopedia of Horror Movies*, Harper & Row, 1986), "... this film takes on a much darker aspect if considered as a sequel to *CAT PEOPLE*... There is a sense here that the curse of the cat people—the solitude that breeds despair and perhaps madness—threatens Carter as much as it once did Simon."

Amy's father now stifles her imagination. He regrets telling Amy that a hollow tree in the yard was a "magic mailbox" because, three years later, she has used it to "mail" her birthday party invitations (a detail from Val Lewton's own life), further alienating classmates who never got their promised party. Imaginative thinking also seems to make Oliver feel personally threatened, when memories of Irena stir up the imaginative part of him that responded to her. In *CAT PEOPLE*, Oliver told Alice how much Irena attracted him, how much he wanted to touch his bride. Twisting a piece of paper compulsively as he talked, he looked tortured, guilty, because he couldn't suppress his sexual urges the way Irena demanded. He still can't burn the photograph of the two of them together. Oliver hid the

picture in a place where Alice would surely come across it. With this passive-aggressive maneuver, Oliver "innocently" lets mundane Alice know that she can't make him forget magical Irena. Maybe now Oliver wonders if Amy has inherited his taint of a wild animal inside.

Although Alice behaved with calculated modesty in CAT PEOPLE, the viewer could understand Irena's ferocious jealousy. When Irena stalked her rival in the justly famous swimming pool scene, Alice wore a skin-tight swim suit with seams that came to perky points over her nipples, exposing the real, passionate Alice who lived under the tasteful business costumes. As Edmund G. Bansak points out, Alice "seems to be a very supportive friend to Oliver, but she deliberately does things to undermine his relationship with Irena."

In the aftermath of two deaths, the homewrecker has now subsided into straitlaced domesticity. Alice probably would never admit that she helped push Irena into her final, fatal breakdown, but the truth comes out in Alice's perfectionism and conformity: the behavior of a guilty, insecure woman who can't please herself. The viewer never sees Oliver and Alice embrace with ardor. Thus Irena has bequeathed her curse, her horror of feral passion, to both the Reeds.

These adults load the weight of their anxieties onto Amy's thin shoulders. In society's harsh judgment, Amy will vindicate or discredit her parents' choices. If Amy looks like a bad girl, or a crazy girl, then the Reeds will look like bad parents. Blind to the reality that his daughter is obsessively honest, tidy, polite, and conscience-stricken beyond her years, Oliver analyses her behavior for hidden, ominous signs and calls her fantasies "lies." In his eyes, she can't do anything right.

Adding to the burden, when Alice walks in on Oliver berating Amy, they quarrel in front of her. Oliver accuses Alice of spoiling Amy, while Alice accuses Oliver of harshness. "You're upset about me," Amy says. "I made you fight. I hate for you to fight." Alice says soothingly that they're not fighting, just having a little discussion. Amy isn't stupid, though; she knows fighting when she sees it. Oliver, who accused Amy of lying when she told the truth about visiting the old green house, passively accepts this obvious lie from Alice. What should a six-year-old make of this mixed message?

When Amy's teacher, Miss Callahan, visits Alice, they discuss Irena's favorite painting, which Oliver keeps on display in the living room: a sour-faced child leads prowling cats toward a bird on the ground. "I've often thought of getting rid of it, but Oliver wouldn't stand for it," Alice snaps. Then she swiftly neutralizes the acid in her voice. She must maintain that facade of calm control.

Alice tells Miss Callahan, "It's almost as if there were a curse on us. I wouldn't care if it were on me, but it seems to be directed against Amy." How disingenuous! Alice clearly feels threatened by Amy's identification with Irena, but plays Selfless Mommy, concerned only for her little girl. "I sometimes think Irena haunts this house," she adds.

Childless Miss Callahan later tells Oliver, "You haven't any special qualifications to handle children, other than parenthood. I've studied children." Never mind that her vast education probably consists of the two years of college plus the one year of teacher training required for a grade school certificate in the 1940s. She's young; she can't have taught for very long.

She describes a child psychology book with "a whole chapter devoted to children like Amy, unhappy and frustrated. Children have only one way of escape. They build companions for themselves." What nonsense! Small children find many other means of escape, such as headbanging, bedwetting, nightmares, and eating disorders. In fact, Amy has nightmares and Edward mentions that usually he must coax her to eat. Worst of all, Miss Callahan tells Oliver, "You've got to be her friend so that she won't need

other friends. You've got to believe what she says." Since when should a father try to become his daughter's only friend? Since when should a parent make a duty of believing the same things a six-year-old believes? Yet Oliver trusts his own common sense so little that he accepts this absurd, unhealthy advice.

As in the previous movie, in which suave psychiatrist Louis Judd (Tom Conway) pays for his professional blundering with his life, the so-called expert fails to help. After the disastrous experience with Judd in CAT PEOPLE (he violated professional ethics by trying to seduce Irena), it's understandable that the Reeds might not wish to undergo further adventures in psychiatry. However, a concerned teacher should suggest counselling when a child can't get along with any of her peers and apparently sees things. What if Irena is not a ghost, a lie, or a harmless imaginary playmate? What if Amy hallucinates Irena? Nobody takes her to a specialist to find out. Instead, her parents just heap on the guilt as Amy fails to meet their expectations.

Amy reveals her stress when she blows out the candles on her birthday cake: "I wished I could be a good girl . . . I'll be just like Daddy wants me to be. Play with the other children, not sit around by myself, tell the truth . . ." That's a strange, sad birthday wish for a six-year-old to make.

For the characters of both Amy and Oliver, Lewton drew on his own oddball childhood and his difficulties as a parent. As a boy, Lewton developed a phobia about cats and an aversion to being touched that never left him. As a youth, Lewton got arrested at a basketball game when he wouldn't quit bellowing speeches from CYRANO. He made up wild stories that got him into trouble, even as an adult. *The Darien-Stamford News* fired Lewton as a reporter, "after it was discovered that his story about a truckload of kosher chickens dying in a New York heat wave was a total fabrication." (Joel E. Siegel, in *Val Lewton: The Reality of Terror*, Viking, 1973) Later, at RKO, Lewton tyrannized his subordinates, while using passive-aggressive behavior against higher-ups. (As a secret insult, the producer wore a certain despised necktie to meetings with bosses he disliked.)

Lewton couldn't get along with his daughter, Nina. According to Nina (interviewed by Siegel), Lewton "often treated her dreadfully. As a child, she was the object of Lewton's quick, violent temper . . . Her youth proved a prolonged battle, with neither father nor daughter budging an inch . . ."

Sociologist David Riesman describes how Oliver and Alice try to dominate their daughter. (See Chapter II, "From Morality to Morale," in *The Lonely Crowd*, Yale University Press, 1950.) But, as Riesman implies, the Reeds' efforts usually backfire. In a perverse way, Oliver hits the target when he says, jokingly, that Amy controls the Reed household. Amy looks like an injured innocent, yet, wise beyond her years, she grows increasingly manipulative.

When Alice tells Amy to return Mrs. Farren's ring, Amy tricks Edward into misunderstanding his instructions to go with her. Against her mother's wishes, Amy goes back to the old house alone—and keeps the ring.

When her teacher bicycles past the house, Amy suggests that Miss Callahan go in for a visit. Most kindergarten kids quail at the thought of a parent/teacher chat, but Amy likes the idea of the adults getting together to talk about her.

When Amy gets her first spanking, for refusing to deny that she "really" sees Irena, the child's staunch honesty satisfies her own moral code, but serves another purpose, too: Amy accepts punishment as a form of attention. As a bonus, when Oliver spansks Amy unjustly, she becomes superior to him. She also divides and conquers, because Alice disapproves of the spanking and makes Oliver

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The ineffectual adults surrounding Amy include teacher Miss Callahan (Eve March) and parents Oliver and Alice Reed (Kent Smith and Jane Randolph).

CURSE OF THE CAT PEOPLE

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feel guilty about it. By manipulating her parents to act "bad" and feel bad, "powerless" Amy controls them.

Then Irena tells the child goodbye, to protect Amy from more punishment. "Out of your loneliness, you called to me and brought me into being. And I came, so that your childhood could be bright and full of friendliness. Now you must send me away."

Amy tearfully protests, "I'll never forget you. If you leave, I'll follow you." Chilling words, possibly a threat, since Amy may realize that Irena is dead. By endangering herself, Amy will soon reassert control over Irena, too.

While Miss Callahan, downstairs, advises the Reeds to give their daughter more freedom, Amy takes freedom. She sneaks out of the house undetected, at night, and wanders through a snowstorm, on roads with traffic. Most parents wouldn't consider it overprotective to keep a close enough eye on a kindergartner to prevent this sort of thing.

Amy must cope with some frightening consequences. Terrified by approaching "headless horseman hoofbeats," she calms down when she sees that a mere automobile is

making the noises, with its loose tire chains thumping. When it counts, Amy can tell the difference between real and unreal. Instead of freezing to death, she seeks shelter with Mrs. Farren. Amy even triumphs over the real menace, Barbara Farren, after old Mrs. Farren, seeking to hide her young visitor, drops dead on her staircase.

Barbara advances, with a poisonous glare. "Even my mother's last moments you've stolen from me! Come here."

"Daddy!" the child calls. No Daddy here. She cries, "My friend!" then sees Irena's image flickering, superimposed over Barbara. "My friend, my friend!" Instead of running, Amy embraces Barbara, whose fingers clutch in Amy's hair, inches from a stranglehold. The cold face of the woman turns blank, then softens. The fingers relax and move down to a gentle hug. The lights brighten. Police and family rush through the open door. But Amy, whose name means "friend" or "beloved," has already rescued herself.

Back home, on the Reeds' porch, a chastened Oliver says, "Amy, from now on, you and I are going to be friends." (Never mind that what she needs from him is a good father.) "I'm going to trust you. I'm going to believe in you. You'll like that, won't you?"

"Yes, Daddy," she says, truthfully but also dutifully.

"Is your friend in the garden? Can you see Irena now?"

Irena appears, smiling. "Yes, I can see her," Amy says, testing her father. (Notice that Amy has already succeeded in making Irena reappear, twice, despite Irena's resolve to disappear forever.)

Oliver says, "I see her, too, darling."

Happy music swells as Oliver and Amy hug. He carries her into their snug, well-lighted house. Fade to black. How sweet.

But what really happens here? Does Oliver really see Irena? He's a little too old for an imaginary playmate. Does he hallucinate his dead wife? If so, he's got a big problem. Or does he see her ghost? A ghost only hangs around if it still has unfinished business. Or does Oliver see nothing, and lie to Amy? If so, then the wise little girl's trapped Daddy. He's the liar, now. And how will Alice like to hear that Oliver has started seeing Irena, too? (Will he see Irena while he makes love to Alice?)

The Curse of the Cat People doesn't lift when the movie ends. The Reeds have resolved nothing. They're worse off than before, sweeping their problems under their nice, clean rug.



ROBERT WISE

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just a few takes, but we rehearsed it pretty thoroughly.

SS: Ann Carter was so wonderful in *CURSE OF THE CAT PEOPLE*. It's surprising that you didn't use her as the little girl in *THE BODY SNATCHERS*.

RW: Yes, wasn't she darling? I don't remember, now, why I didn't use her again. I think Ann did maybe one or two other little films, and then nothing ever seemed to happen for her. She was so marvelous, though. She was just lovely in *THE CURSE OF THE CAT PEOPLE*.

SS: After working with Val Lewton, you went on to successfully directing *A pictures*. Why do you feel Lewton himself couldn't make that jump?

RW: I don't know. I think it kind of killed him, somehow. It was one of the things that brought on his heart attack. He had such a wonderful thing going for him there at RKO, this little unit called the Snake Pit, because there he made these seven or eight small, classy pictures and he got national attention.

SS: James Agee always made a point in his reviews of praising Lewton's films.

RW: Yes, exactly. He was written up in the national magazines as somebody who was very exceptional, and he was most happy doing that. But on the Hollywood scene, his agents and some of his friends kept saying to him, "You've got to move up! Move up to the A pictures." So, I think—though I never talked this out with him—I always sensed that he left RKO reluctantly and went to Paramount. He was signed there to do a big picture, and he did one picture there with an English star [Phyllis Calvert]—and it was a big flop. He then left Paramount and was signed at MGM. He did one picture there with Deborah Kerr [*PLEASE BELIEVE ME*/1950], which didn't work at all and he left MGM. Someplace along there is when he had his first heart attack. The first didn't get him, but it was just the frustration of what had happened to him; he had been so happy in his little unit at RKO. Then he got over the heart attack. He had just been signed with Stanley Kramer, who

had just gone over with his company to Universal. Kramer had just signed Lewton to come over to his unit when Val had his second, fatal heart attack. It's too bad. He was just a tremendous talent.

SS: What did you learn about filming suspense and horror movies while working with Val Lewton?

RW: Well, the main thing is that so much can be done through the power of suggestion. I was insistent about doing just that in *THE HAUNTING*. I've had so many people say to me over the years, "How in the world did you make one of the scariest films I've ever seen, and you didn't show anything? How'd you do it?" Well, I did it by suggestion, and that comes from Lewton. It was inherent in the book, but I just played on it as much as I could. That's what I learned from Val Lewton.

To Be Concluded . . .

Our Man on Baker Street

by David Stuart Davies

I wonder if you have ever played the genre wishing game. For example, I wish Peter Cushing had made a film with Basil Rathbone. I wish Basil Rathbone had been given Jeremy Brett's scripts and his Watsons. I wish there was a film or a video of Jeremy Brett as Dracula. I wish that Dracula had met the Marx Bros. (on film, of course) and so on . . . One can also wish to see those films we have read about and seen stills from, but which are deemed to be lost or in an unviewable condition. One of the great lost Sherlock Holmes movies was the 1922 feature film produced by the Samuel Goldwyn Studios called, simply, *SHERLOCK HOLMES*, and starring John Barrymore, the Great Profile, as the Great Detective.

It was thought to be lost until the seventies, when parts of it were found in a warehouse in New York. What in fact was discovered were rolls and rolls of negative sections in which every take was jumbled out of order, with only a few flash frame titles for guidance. The task of putting the film together was taken up by film historian Kevin Brownlow. He has had a lifelong passion for film, particularly silent films, and was instrumental in restoring Abel Gance's masterpiece *NAPOLEON* (1927/1981). *SHERLOCK HOLMES* hardly falls into the same rich category, but it is an important film and the muddled reels presented a challenge that Brownlow could

not resist. As it happened, the director of the film, Albert Parker, was living in London at the time and working as a theatrical agent. Brownlow contacted him, but found that Parker, then quite an old man, had only the vaguest memories of the film. The fact that the film was based on the famous William Gillette play (1899) did not help very much, either, as the story had been opened out, mucked about with, and embroidered. Nevertheless, eventually Brownlow pieced the rolls together into a logical sequence, but found that there were several scenes missing. They remain missing to this day.

Therefore it was clear that, although a major percentage of the film was restored, it could never be shown commercially or released on video because of its incompleteness. Another aspect of the film that was problematic was the flash cards, or title captions. There were far more than average for a silent film of its day. In fact, Brownlow has stated *SHERLOCK HOLMES* was really "the first talking silent film" because there was so much dialogue to read. One can imagine the screenwriters—Marion Fairfax and Earle Brown—believing that, because Sherlock Holmes was a literary character, and a very verbal one at that, he should be given great chunks of dialogue. And so he was. He would mouth something and then the screen would go



black and the dialogue was printed for the audience to read, with the result that the pace of the film is interminably slow. One contemporary review noted that: ". . . the subtitles had to be made continuous to let us know what it was all about."

Despite knowing all this, *SHERLOCK HOLMES* has been on my wish list for quite a long time. And sometimes wishes come true. Part of my Sherlockian duties in Britain is to arrange The Sherlock Holmes Society of London's Film Evening. Taking a gamble, I rang up Kevin Brownlow to see if he would be prepared to let us see Parker's part work at this year's event. Not only did he agree, but he also arranged for a pianist to accompany the movie.

To help give the movie back some of its pace, Brownlow has cut out a great number of the captions. As the film was being projected, he read the dialogue through a radio mike. It took only a few minutes to get used to this novel way of making a silent film into a talkie.

What of the film? Well, it is not a great movie, but it is a very fascinating one, which includes location shooting in England and Switzerland. It presents us with a very youthful Sherlock. We see him first as a student at Cambridge University, where he encounters Professor Moriarty, played as a grotesque goblin by Gustav von Seyffertitz. (This German actor gave the screen its ugliest Moriarty—"his blood as cold as ice.")

At the university, young Prince Alexei (Reginald Denny) is accused of stealing athletic funds. His friend, another young student, a chap by the name of Watson (Roland Young, famous as Cosmo Topper in the thirties), recalls: "There's a fellow in my year who dabbles in mysteries." It is, of course, Sherlock Holmes, whom we first encounter sitting under a tree, dreamily making notes in a book.

Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson (John Barrymore and Roland Young) are old school chums in the 1922 film of the William Gillette play.





Holmes looks like he's about to shoot Billy (Jerry Devine) in the head instead of Professor Moriarty (Gustav von Seyffertitz).

Holmes solves the matter in no time and thus we are presented with another cinematic version of how Holmes and Watson met. (Spielberg was to take it a step further back in his 1986 movie *YOUNG SHERLOCK HOLMES*, in which the pair met at boarding school. I suppose there is only the nursery class and the maternity ward left.)

It is at university that Holmes becomes smitten by the lovely Alice Faulkner (Carol Dempster, Esmeralda to Lon Chaney's Quasimodo in 1923's *THE*

HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME) and remains besotted with her for the rest of the movie, which is not a Holmes that Conan Doyle would recognize. Later, he sets himself up in Baker Street to help "the weary and mystery-laden." When he learns that the love of his life is being held prisoner by the Larabees, who are under instructions from Moriarty, he sets out to rescue her and defeat the Napoleon of Crime. From then on the film follows the plot of the Gillette play quite closely, including the famous gas chamber sequence—which, sadly, is one of the scenes missing from Brownlow's print. At the

end, Moriarty is dispatched and Holmes is about to depart on his honeymoon. This heresy is compounded by a final passionate embrace between hero and his lady. Actually, according to the director, Barrymore did not care for his leading lady and, in the final clinch, he turns his back to the camera so that you cannot see that he is not really kissing her.

Barrymore gives us a very charismatic Holmes, looking not unlike a ruffled Jeremy Brett. He made this observa-

tion when filming: "My feeling is that, for film audiences scattered the world over, it is not sufficient merely to bring Sherlock and show him at work . . . to explain the conflict in the drama we are presenting, we desire to make it clear why Sherlock Holmes is what he is . . . to trace, in other words, his development as the Master Detective."

One contemporary reviewer observed that Barrymore "thoroughly humanized the Conan Doyle creation." Indeed, in general, Barrymore scooped up good reviews for his performance: "He is such an expressive pantomimist and is so distinctly an individual . . ." The film itself fared less well. *The New York Times* asked, "How stands *SHERLOCK HOLMES*?" and then answered its own question: ". . . it falls, it falls to pieces."

It is interesting to note that the film was released in Britain as *MORIARTY*. It has been suggested that this was for legal reasons, but the mediocrity of so many of the earlier Sherlock Holmes films may well have been the deciding factor in changing the title.

And so, in seeing the movie 75 years after it was made, I have had another wish granted. Now how about a remake of *THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES* with Daniel Day Lewis as Holmes and Kenneth Branagh as Watson?

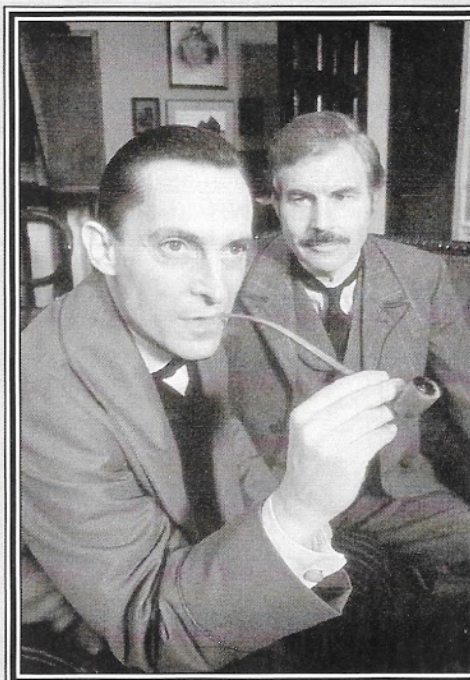


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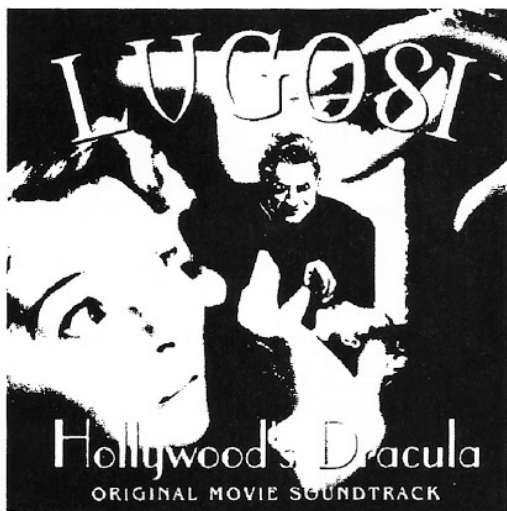
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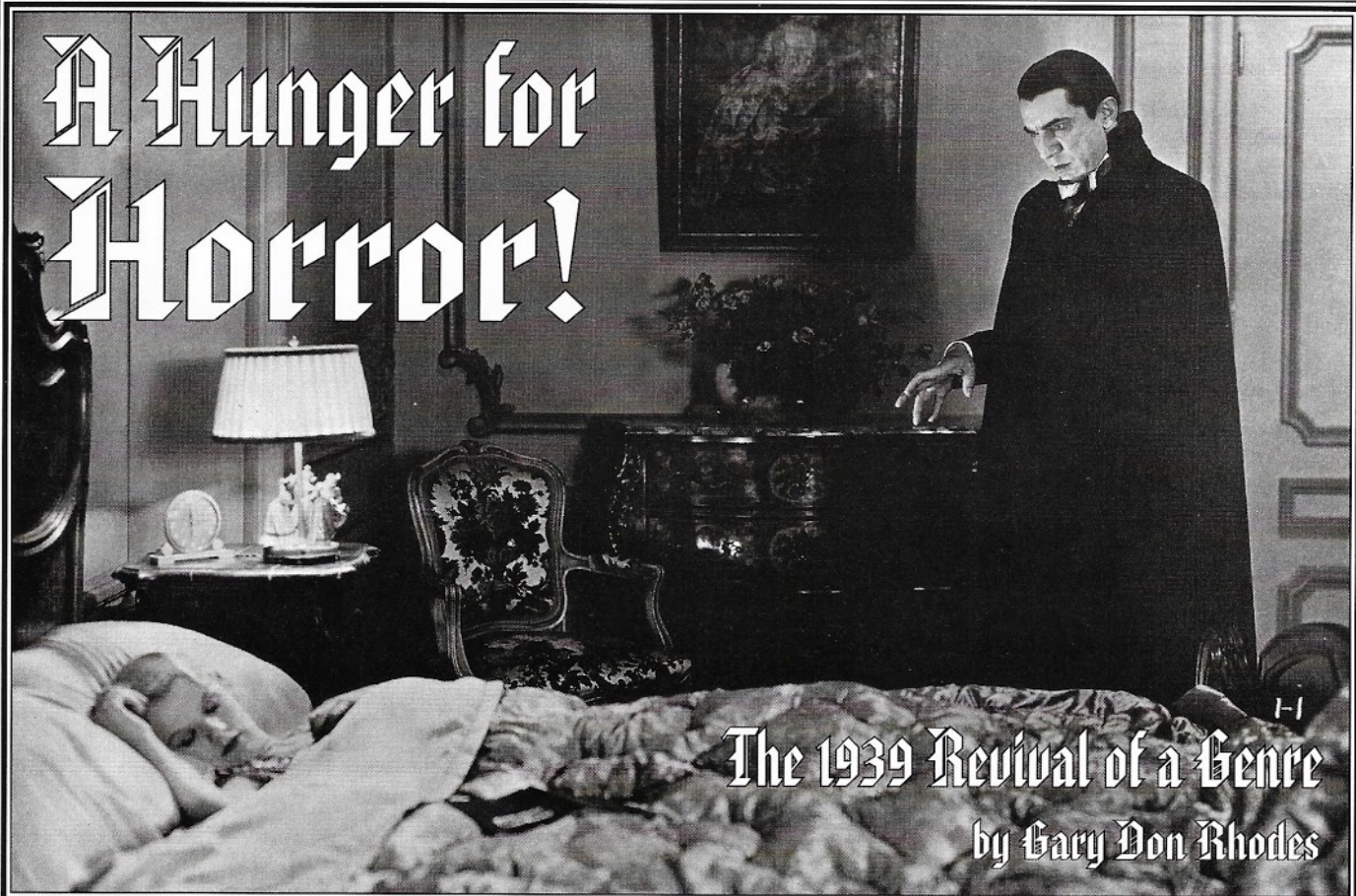
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A Hunger for Horror!



The 1939 Revival of a Genre

by Gary Don Rhodes

Since Oklahoma City's Warner could not obtain prints of DRACULA and FRANKENSTEIN (both 1931), they booked a double bill of DRACULA'S DAUGHTER (1936) and THE WALKING DEAD (1936) during the Halloween season, and DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE (1932) in mid-November. Before Bostonians witnessed the return of "Drac" and "Frank," the nearby Lynn Open-Air Theater brought the special return of KING KONG (1933), to be screened "rain or shine."

Even in areas where DRACULA and FRANKENSTEIN scored big, competition from other early thirties horror came in droves. Houston theaters offered such Karloff features as THE INVISIBLE MENACE (1938) and the British-made THE GHOUL (1933). Chicago's Cosmo Theatre dared viewers to withstand their horror double bill of THE WALKING DEAD and THE GHOST WALKS (1934). Interestingly, Chicago became one of the most inundated cities of horror cinema, with audiences lining up for such hastily-arranged double bills as KING KONG and THE MAN WHO LIVED AGAIN (1936), WHITE ZOMBIE (1932) and THE BAT WHISPERS (1931), and THE VAMPIRE BAT (1933) and THE MISSING GUEST (1938). In late October, Los Angeles-area viewers could also have seen various "Halloween Spook Shows," with such films as THE MONSTER WALKS (1932) creeping back onto the silver screen. By November 1, Universal reissued DRACULA'S DAUGHTER and BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN (1935) as a new horror show, forming another successful double bill.

Though the overwhelming evidence illustrates theaters attempting to put together double bills to heighten the horror, many exhibitors were relegated to screening single movies in the intense rush to bring horror to the screen and capitalize on consumer interest. Before Tulsa received any double bill of terror, THE THIRTEENTH GUEST (1932) played alone on Halloween, with the Main Street Theatre crowning it the "spookiest picture of them all." Various Chicago theaters ran such single horror epics as CRIMES

OF DR. CRESPI (1935) to bring in patrons famished for film-induced fear.

Additionally, many theaters promoted detective and mystery films as horror movies. Houstonites were told to join in the supposed horrors of THE SHADOW STRIKES (1937) and SH! THE OCTOPUS (1937). "Don't Be A Sissy—Attend!" the ads challenged Texas moviegoers. Via newspaper ads, the Cinema reminded Chicagoans that the 1937 mystery THE THIRTEENTH CHAIR had a spooky "medium" and used a "spiritualist seance as a background."

A full-page ad in October 12's *Variety* preached to exhibitors: "Throw away the Books! Forget All You Ever Knew About Showmanship . . . Because Horror Is Paying Off Again!" Theater managers and producers came to the same conclusion. "No longer do they consider the success of the two ancient shriekers as a freak of the show business," *Variety* reported on November 17. "Instead, they feel that the previous horror film epidemic was ended before the public had its fill." On October 7, *The Hollywood Reporter* announced that the horror revivals had doubled the average business of many theaters. Ed Sullivan's syndicated column "Looking at Hollywood" noted on October 22 that the seventh biggest show in the country was the double feature of DRACULA and FRANKENSTEIN, surpassing almost every new film then playing. One statistic maintained that, by December, "Drac" and "Frank" had played in 5,487 theaters.

The revival brought a wave of new productions. Immediately after the Regina's success, many studios, according to an August 22 *Hollywood Reporter*, were "confidentially asking agents to find them stories of this type." By October 12, *Variety* claimed Universal was "dickering for players and stories of the creepy variety to cash in on the revival of interest in horror pictures."

The October 20 *Hollywood Reporter* mentioned that the "Horror Craze Lifts Karloff's Mono Ticket," claiming that the revival had prompted Monogram Studios to extend the

2ND WEEK! THE DOUBLE-HORROR
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BELA LUGOSI in
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AND
FRANKENSTEIN
with **BORIS KARLOFF**
WE DARE YOU TO SEE THEM BOTH TOGETHER

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ON OUR STAGE—TONIGHT at 11:00
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ONE FULL HOUR OF FREE SWING DANCING
Come Early—See The Show! Stay Late to Dance!

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MIDNIGHT SATURDAY
Doors Open 11:30 All Seats 50c

We Dare You To See IT!!
DOUBLE "HORROR" SHOW
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FRANKENSTEIN
with **BORIS KARLOFF**
DRACULA
with **BELA LUGOSI**
Can You Take It?

STARTS TOMORROW

**DOUBLE HORROR
SHOW!**

WE DARE YOU
TO SEE IT!

FRANKENSTEIN
starring
KARLOFF
and
DRACULA
starring
BELA LUGOSI
A NEW
UNIVERSAL PICTURE
**TOGETHER—ON
THE SAME SHOW!**

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25c to 1 o'clock
Doors open 8:30 A.M.

Mr. Wong detective series. (The October 1 issue already had mentioned that Warner Bros. sought Karloff, as well as Claude Rains and Bela Lugosi, for roles in *THE RETURN OF DR. X*.) On January 16, 1939, *The Hollywood Reporter* reported Warners' plans to sign Karloff for *DARK TOWER*. Studios quickly planned other horror epics for 1939, with Karloff's career surging upward and Lugosi's rescued from bankruptcy.

Of course, the genre's resuscitation did not escape the watchful eye of England. A November 1938 letter from J. Brooke Wilkinson (Secretary of the BBFC) to Joseph Breen at Hollywood's Production Code Administration (PCA) expressed concern over Universal's desire to produce a new wave of horror films. This time, however, the studios decided to listen to American audiences.

As 1938 came to a close, a December 18 syndicated newspaper article claimed as one of the major events of the year the fact that "Boris Karloff digs old horror makeup out of mothballs and a new graveyard cycle starts." One of the earliest films to enter production was *SON OF FRANKENSTEIN* (1939), featuring Basil Rathbone, Karloff, and Lugosi, with trades announcing that the "picture will be hurried through to cash in on the interest stirred in this type of fare." On February 28, 1939, *Look* magazine claimed "This picture starts a new reign of terror from Hollywood," adding "'Nightmares for everybody' is the Hollywood slogan for a more horrible 1939."

Still, exhibitors and producers seemed unable to explain the revival. *The New York Times* (October 16) mentioned that "Veteran showmen who once saw Barnum plain and thought they had seen about everything else are at a loss to account for this frantic public thirst for added supernatural in a world where natural horror is the makeup of every day's front page." One explanation offered by director Rowland V. Lee, then helming *SON OF FRANKENSTEIN*, strikes at the same issue. Lee believed that the question behind enthusiastic attendance should not have been why horror was popular at the moment, but rather why it was popular at all. In a syndicated newspaper article (December 11, 1938), he concluded—in essentially a cathartic view—that the genre was always topical "for the same reason that a murder or kidnapping or a major accident or a great catastrophe is always front page news."

Several months earlier, the May-June issue of *Cinema Progress* had offered Bela Lugosi's similar views on the genre: "'I think atavism has a great deal to do with it,' explained the Hungarian actor. 'For instance, a prehistoric man may never have been burned by fire, yet some primitive sense warns him to be afraid of it. This fear of fire was undoubtedly transmitted from some previous ancestor who had been burned.' In the same way, he believes, these inherited instincts arouse fears in us today which have never been derived from actually passing through terrifying experiences. When we go into a theater and see something horrible transpired upon the screen these long dormant fears come to life again. We get the same electric thrill which must have surged through the blood of a caveman ancestor upon suddenly being confronted by a sabre-tooth

tiger. But with this difference: We enjoy all the delicious nuances of the hair tingling, heart pounding sensation without having to undergo the danger concurrent with it . . . Taking comfort in the thought that it is only a play, he can let out a 'whew!' and grip the sides of his chair a little harder."

The cathartic reason given for the ongoing interest in horror is that moviegoers simply enjoy being scared. Yet, this quick analysis does not really explain the consistent popularity of the genre any more than it explains the horror revival of 1938. Psychological and psychoanalytic

viewpoints—insightful though they may be—do not speak to the unique historical and cultural realities of the Great Depression.

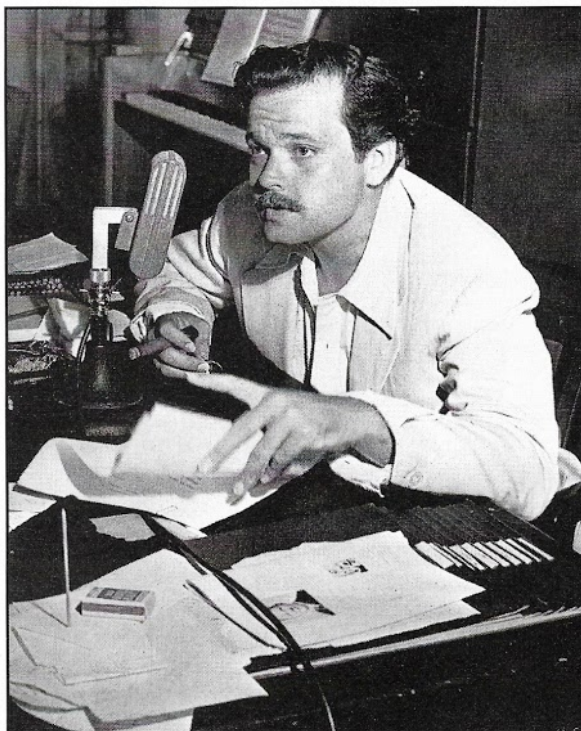
Some pointed to the double billing of *DRACULA* and *FRANKENSTEIN* as the reason for the revival's success, with *Variety* mentioning on October 10 that the combination seemed "to prove that two shivering customers would grow where one sprouted before." Additionally, exhibitors noted that the two films were "cashing in where single showing of either picture, or one in combination with some other type billing, made no box office ripple." Though double bills historically date back to the twenties, they had begun to flourish in the early thirties as a way for independent theater owners who couldn't afford stage shows or vaudeville to bring in crowds.

Strangely, one poll taken at about the time of the revival showed that 92% of audiences disliked double bills, though box office receipts prove otherwise. During 1933-34, the issue flamed into a heated one, with the motion picture Code Authority stepping in to examine the matter. Some

insisted that double features would kill the short subject industry, while independent filmmakers declared it would be they who would die without the dual bills. Major producing companies sometimes inserted contract clauses prohibiting their features from appearing on dual bills, and the MPTOA went on record as being strongly against the practice. Yet, from 1933 to 1934, the sheer number of houses playing double features increased from some 5,000 to approximately 7,000.

The importance of the debate cannot be underestimated. Edward Golden, in a speech made at the Community Church in New York and quoted in the December 17, 1934 *Film Daily*, attempted to convince listeners that the issue itself was not a "moral" one; such was the level of intensity generated by the debate. Of course, the sheer hint of a triple bill—the very method the Regina used to blaze the horror revival—caused fear in many quarters. Interestingly, in the March 26, 1934 *Film Daily*, many exhibitors blamed the major studios for the triple threat, since these had often occurred on the West Coast, when studios added a preview film to an already double feature program.

By 1938, dual-bill theaters were clearly getting the business, while single-film houses began failing. Many theater owners hated both the additional cost of a second feature and being saddled by studios with certain B films to take along with the ones they wanted, but audiences still craved more films for the same money. The "shock package" of *DRACULA* and *FRANKENSTEIN* provided an answer with



Your Obedient Servant, Orson Welles, contributed to the late thirties hunger for horror with his landmark radio broadcast of *THE WAR OF THE WORLDS*.

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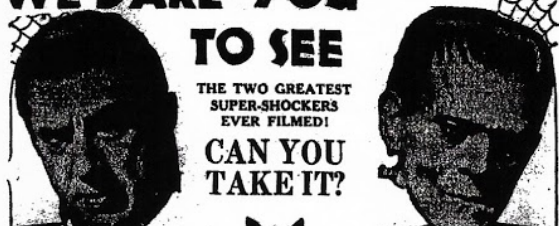
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JOHN WAYNE, 'PALS OF THE SADDLE' & 'DICK TRACY RETURNS'
CARTOON & COMEDY—BOTH BIG SHOWS—Children 10c [Special Horror Show] Saturday Midnight

Pages 63 and 65: the original newspaper advertisements from the spook shows that revived the horror genres in 1938 and 1939.



DRACULA (1931) and FRANKENSTEIN (1931) shared a number of attributes, not the least being supporting players Edward Van Sloan (LEFT, with Bela Lugosi) and Dwight Frye (RIGHT, with Boris Karloff). BOTTOM LEFT: *Scarlet Street* interviewee David Manners is menaced by Helen Chandler in DRACULA.

the horror formulae offering a dual bill without the drastic variance in quality of an A film and a lower grade B. Thus, the horror revival reinforced the public's desire for double bills. However, even though two horror films helped curb audience appetites for the genre, quantity alone did not generate the desire for such topics.

The idea of spectatorship—in a historical/cultural sense—reveals important, if not complex, information about the 1938 revival. Fortunately, local reviewers in many cities mentioned audience response within their own critiques. For example, a writer in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch's Women's Sunday Magazine* (October 7) noted that the "reaction to the two big scare epics of 1931 is not attended with the gasps that greeted them on their separate and original appearances. Whenever Bela Lugosi, as Dracula, starts fixing the evil eye or Boris Karloff, as the Monster created by Dr. Frankenstein, snarls at a new victim, the customers laugh." Yet, the same writer had to admit that audiences had an "appetite for horror and can't get enough of it."

The *New Orleans Times-Picayune* (September 2, 1938) said of FRANKENSTEIN: "Despite Mr. Karloff's horrendous appearance and the general air of evil and disaster which permeates the film, this department found itself

more jittery watching Robert Montgomery and his hat box in NIGHT M U S T FALL than it did while witnessing the perambulations of Mr. Karloff."

A columnist in *The Washington Post* (November 4) claimed that he witnessed "patrons who shrieked, screamed, groaned, grunted, and even whistled in ecstatic enthusiasm over the thrills and gooseflesh afforded them." Though he also mentioned that some audience members seemed impressed that the two films had "survived the years as perhaps the foremost examples of their gruesome type," his initial list of audience responses seem to drift from those who were actually scared to those simply having fun (e.g. "whistling," etc.). In conclusion, he maintained that "great crowds seemed highly edified and highly excited by it," calling the double bill a "compilation of potential heart failure."

Similarly, a writer for *The Atlanta Constitution* claimed on September 11 that "Young girls clung frantically to the arms of their escorts and children screamed in, well, it could be called delight for everyone seemed pleased. At times it was more entertaining to watch the reaction of the audience than to watch the monsters on the screen. It was a full house that saw the double feature . . . and every member of the audience reacted differently."

A large number of children saw the two films, with few apparently laughing out loud. Katherine K. Vandervoort, director of attendance for the White Plains, New York public school system, began questioning elementary school youngsters after running into an hysterical little boy who was trying to find his way home. He shrieked that a "Frank somebody" was going to kill someone. The child had been to a matinee at Keith's, only to be frightened senseless. Vandervoort attended the show herself to find a house full of children, and, questioning more students, she learned that an overwhelming number had seen the show. Yet, even the little boy did not stand as an example for his age group. Vandervoort's investigation found just as many children "wide eyed with excitement" as those genuinely scared. (Though they made up an important segment of the horror audience, children, according to trade accounts, were outnumbered by adults.)

The number of responses given to horror films problematize finding a reason for their 1938 success. One possibility offered at the time was the spectre of a European war. Certainly, U.S. citizens were aware on a day-to-day basis of Nazi Germany's actions. Chamberlain's "Peace in our time" aside, they were warned to be skeptical by such radio commentators as H.V. Kaltenbom. Headlines marked Hitler's obsessive march toward an *Anschluss* with Austria, and his handing of ultimatums and a "zero hour" to Czechoslovakia for the Sudetenland. Germany insured real-life fears not only for ordi-



nary Americans, but for movie moguls, who realized the impact war would have on the overseas markets.

Fear of war came to a head with Orson Welles' famed "War of the Worlds" broadcast on the October 30, 1938 MERCURY THEATER ON THE AIR. The fact that the fictional program was readily mistaken for reality exemplifies the tension existing that autumn in the United States. (Headlines of the eerie incident grace the same newspaper pages in Dallas and Atlanta as ads for the DRACULA and FRANKENSTEIN double bill.)

Reactions to the Martian attack varied, of course, but Hadley Cantril's seminal work *The Invasion From Mars: A Study in the Psychology of Panic* (Princeton University, 1940) offers a firsthand examination of audience responses. Of the people who took the show seriously, Cantril claimed "As in all panics, the individual believed his well-being, his safety, or his life was at stake. The situation was a real threat to him."

In his November 2 newspaper piece, columnist Heywood Broun wrote: "I doubt if this sort of thing would have happened four or five months ago. The course of world history has affected national psychology. Jitters have come home to roost. We have just gone through a laboratory demonstration of the fact that the peace of Munich hangs heavy over our heads, like a thundercloud."

Cantril agreed with Broun's assertion, yet he believed the situation had even deeper roots: "That 'the course of world history' has affected us is a truism. But this course of history contains more than war crises. Just what has happened is too familiar to be recited here. Probably more important than anything else, the highly disturbed economic conditions many Americans have experienced for the past decade, the consequent unemployment, the prolonged discrepancies between family incomes, the inability of both young and old to plan for the future have engendered a widespread feeling of insecurity."

The "War of the Worlds" incident itself stands not only as a testament to the state of the American mind at that time, but also to Hollywood's unique ability to draw entertainment from gruesome topics. As a result of the broadcast, Orson Welles signed an RKO contract and Paramount Studios—who then owned the movie rights to the H.G. Wells novel—found themselves in an advantageous position to capitalize on the excitement. Moreover, the studio was already in production on a similar drama, titled *INVASION*, which the studio quickly announced as a "super-budget opus."

In early November, in an obvious attempt to capitalize on the Welles broadcast, Universal took out a two-page advertisement in *The Hollywood Reporter* announcing *MARS ATTACKS THE WORLD*, the reissue of a Flash Gordon serial in feature form.

While the radio show was markedly different from the revived horror films, the incident shows how both movie producers and the public were poised to transform fear into box office success. In the May-June 1938 *Cinema Progress*, a "prominent psychologist" claimed "Horror as it is shown

on the screen and as it is told in news accounts is a far cry from the nastiness of reality, since, in both cases, gruesome details cannot be presented in entirety." The Welles broadcast questioned that belief; despite the fact that audiences neither saw nor experienced the alien invasion, many adults believed it to be reality. No records of audience response can say the same of *DRACULA* and *FRANKENSTEIN*, which—whatever the reaction—were viewed as fiction.

As intriguing as such information may be, the fear of war cannot wholly account for the genre's intense popularity. In view of audience responses, *DRACULA* and *FRANKENSTEIN* did not—as some contemporary accounts suggest—contribute to the "tension of the times."

Clearly, the horror film had found tremendous success at the beginning of the thirties and up until the British Ban. Thus *Variety's* belief that the initial cycle had ended too soon becomes the key to understanding the public interest in horror. On October 10th, the trade went so far as to mention that a large segment of the American public had been "almost completely neglected" in the years since the British Ban had occurred.

The 1938 *Cinema Progress* article on horror films did chronicle a few non-psychoanalytic reasons for the genre's popularity. "A peculiar attraction of horror films is their bizarre departure from ordinary experiences and the usual run of films, Lugosi believes. People are 'tired of mush' and seek escape from the worries and depressions of a dull, everyday world."

In fact, Lugosi is incorrect in his analysis. In many ways, the horror films of the thirties mirror the realities of America at the time. As Lugosi's *DRACULA* ushered in horror, the Great Depression's shadow loomed over the entire country. Of course, many in the U.S. blamed Europeans—allies and enemies alike—for World War One and America's entry into it, as well as lack of repayment of war reparations and the Great Depression itself. Instability brewed suspicion, which often bubbled into a cauldron of political discontent. This in turn undermined affection toward recent European immigrants to the U.S., and the country grew more isolationist in nature. After all, healthy young men—even those with an education—found little chance of supporting themselves, let alone a potential wife and family. Unemployment reigned, with such natural disasters as the Dust Bowl additional factors that left America's men impotent against their prevailing problems.

Fright films subsequent to *DRACULA* continued to utilize many of its elements to great effect. Horror in the early thirties wore a foreign face, both in its cast members (Lugosi, Karloff, Atwill, etc.) and the ethnicity of the characters themselves (Dracula, Hjalmar Poelzig, Robert von Helldorf, etc.). On the other hand, the ineffectual male heroes—personified by David Manners in *DRACULA*, *THE*



Dwight Frye and Friend in *FRANKENSTEIN*

Continued on page 11

Book Ends

The Scarlet Street Review of Books

THE NIGHT STALKER COMPANION

Mark Dawidziak

Pomegranate Press, 1997

207 pages—\$19.95

It was a clever novel that gave life to two popular TV movies and a rather unpopular (at least in the ratings) series that ran for 20 episodes.

It was, according to producer Chris Carter, the inspiration for THE X-FILES.

It created an avatar for a generation of would-be journalists to emulate, and a headache for a generation of newspaper editors who had to listen to versions of "This is a newspaper! We are a news-paper! We are supposed to print the news!"

"It" is, of course, THE NIGHT STALKER, the subject of *The Night Stalker Companion: A 25th Anniversary Tribute*, a rewritten and updated version of the 1991 book *Night Stalking: A 20th Anniversary Kolchak Companion*. (The original is long out of print, being listed as "rare and collectible" in some catalogues.) As the author states in his new prologue, there is much new material, including new interviews with producers and series regulars. In addition, there is talk of a new NIGHT STALKER movie. All of this is reason enough for a fresh look at the Kolchak legend. The best reason, however, is the author's joy and continued fascination with his subject.

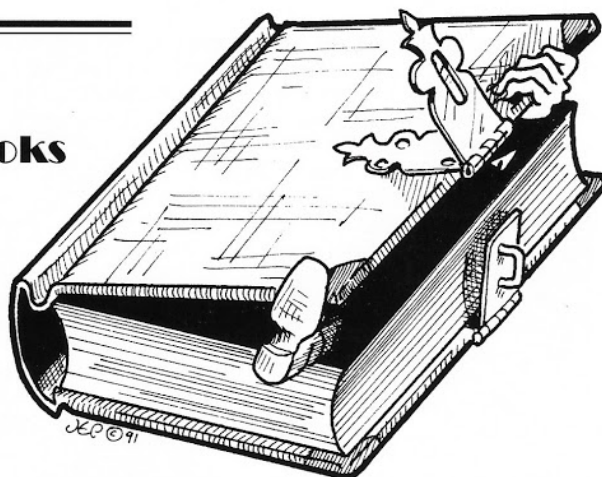
Mark Dawidziak has worked as a theater, film, and television critic for almost 20 years. He is the author of several non-fiction works, a stage play, and a Kol-

chak novel, *Grave Secrets* (1994). He has been a regular contributor to *TV Guide*, *Cinefantastique*, and *Scarlet Street*, and credits his continued success in the field of journalism, at least in part, to the inspiration he received from the vision of the all-too-human fictional newshound named Carl Kolchak, first seen in a TV movie called THE NIGHT STALKER (1971).

There are many cult favorites in the mystery and horror genre whose continuing popularity is an insoluble mystery to those who have not been captured by them, but THE NIGHT STALKER is, happily, not in this category. The original novel, *The Kolchak Papers* (1973), as written by Jeff Rice, was a totally new and typically American product, "... a conscious attempt to blend the traditional vampire legend with the boistrous style of plays and movies about American newspaper reporters. To boil the concept down to terms that even a network executive could understand, it was DRACULA meets THE FRONT PAGE." In a further stroke of genius, Rice placed his story in the city he himself had once covered as a reporter, the archetypically flashy and trashy Las Vegas of the seventies. In doing so, Rice thrust the vampire into contemporary life in a way that, say, DARK SHADOWS, with its Gothic isolation and ruined mansions, never quite could. He also introduced another villain into the stew, best called Official Corruption, the favorite beast of writers from Ben Hecht to Oliver Stone. Add an incorruptible reporter of the Hildy Johnson school, and you have an unbeatable combination.

Parenthetically, it might be amusing to compare the two brands of monsters. In both the movies and the series, Carl Kolchak proved to be a formidable, if shaky-kneed, adversary for vampire, werewolf, witch, and zombie, but never once did he ever make a dent in the big O.C. The vampire has turned to dust, and the dust is being swept under the carpet by civic goons who make it clear that, yes, the truth is out there, and no, we will not be allowed to hear it. In this, Carl is obviously the spiritual father of X-FILES' Mulder and Scully, whose series is full of more sinister figures sweeping much more dust under many more rugs.

Dawidziak attacks his subject with zest, delineating the contributions and backgrounds of the four men responsible for creating a ratings explosion with the origi-



nal TV movie. They all get their due: Jeff Rice, the author; the incomparable Richard Matheson, who wrote the teleplay; Dan Curtis, the producer; and Darren McGavin, who gave Carl Kolchak a life that will most likely outlast all of us.

In addition to separate chapters on each film, there are pieces on each of the series episodes, with complete cast lists, synopses, and evaluations in true Kolchak style, such as the following from Episode Eleven:

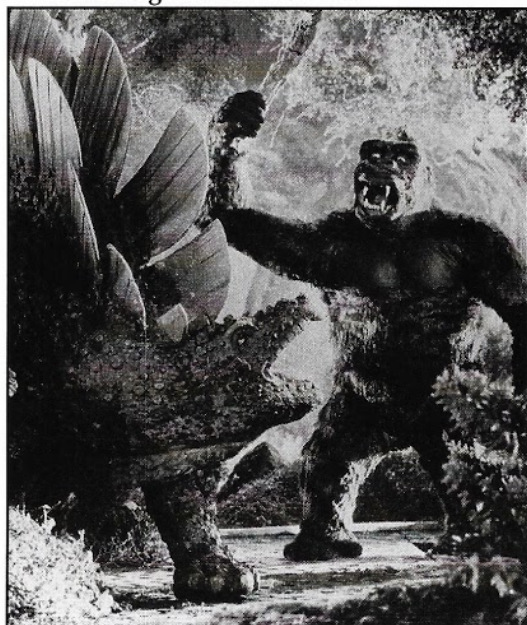
"ITEM: And you just must like an episode that has Tony describe a picture of the monster as looking like 'Bongo the Chimp with fangs.'"

The author also has a fine feeling for the period, giving us a true taste of the seventies. Finally, and most importantly, he has not let his enthusiasm blind him to the blemishes on the canvas. Indeed, he writes at length on the clashes between McGavin and Curtis on the second film, THE NIGHT STRANGLER, the inexplicable freezing out of Rice during the series, and the conflicts between McGavin, who thought he was the series producer, and Cy Chermak, who knew he was ...

Proofreading errors in the latest generation of books are fairly common and *The Night Stalker Companion* is, unfortunately, not immune to this defect. This is, however, the smallest of problems in a work that is literate, entertaining, and highly recommended.

—Ken Schactman

Hoping to dispell rumors of discord, two stars of KING KONG (1933) pose for a friendly publicity shot, although they have no scenes together in the film.



GOLDEN HORRORS

Bryan Senn

McFarland, 1996

Box 611

Jefferson NC 28640

518—\$55

In an era when film scholarship has provided us with an endless parade of tomes examining, dissecting, and critiquing Hollywood's Golden Age of Horror from every possible perspective, one invariably begins to develop a discerning edge before homing in on a new work dedicated to the genre. That is why *Golden Horrors* is a sparkle of light, a splash of color in a literary landscape rapidly turning gray. Within its 500 plus pages, author Bryan Senn has managed to gather together 46 titles from the thirties, some acknowledged classics, some

obviously less so, and even a few whose titles may not be familiar to any but the most devoted film archaeologists.

Of the 46 thrillers representing the years 1931 to 1939, Senn includes a smattering of titles achingly familiar (particularly the cornerstone Universals), but manages to take a fresh enough approach to his critical examinations that they make for quick, enlightening and entertaining reads. To his credit, no less than a dozen titles, while they are far from classics (and, in about half the cases, downright poor), have the distinction of having had very little or nothing previously written about them.

Trying for a different approach, Senn breaks his chapters down into concise synopses—"memorable moments," "assets," and "liabilities"—in addition to providing the usual production notes. Though some of the notes are derivative, there is enough fresh material and new insights to make reading about some of our cinematic "old friends" an enjoyable experience once more. In one case, *BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN* (1935), this takes the form of knocking the unchallenged champ of thirties monster films askew on its pedestal. The performances of Valerie Hobson and Una O'Connor are berated as being irritating, as is the film's foray into "near-juvenile fantasy" in the form of Dr. Pretorius' homunculi. Whereas this may strike some as heresy, the challenge is refresh-

ing, in that Senn's style rings with true personal conviction. However, how many would agree that Boris Karloff's thesping in *THE INVISIBLE RAY* (1936) ranks as his "worst genre performance of the decade?"

Of the lesser-known horrors, many are foreign productions, such as the German/French *VAMPIRE* of 1932, and Britain's 1932 *THE LODGER* (a remake of the 1926 Hitchcock production). Good editing and an interesting music score is about all that is ascribed to Britain's *THE SECRET OF THE LOCH* (1934), but *THE MAN WHO CHANGED HIS MIND* (1936) receives high praise for a "full-blooded Karloff performance" and its effective mix of science and Gothic elements.

Some real baddies are covered here, which makes one wonder how they made their way into the "Golden" category. Sideshowman Dwain Esper's *MANIAC* (1934) is described as a combination of exploitation sleaze and light porn, escaping the Hays Office watchdogs by being exhibited at "adults only" theaters and burlesque houses. *CONDEMNED TO LIVE* (1935) has very little to recommend it and much to laugh at, according to Senn, but somehow he manages to imbue in his depictions of both these pictures the dreamlike impression of a quirky, skewed world—similar to what Ed Wood unwittingly accomplished. It's enough to make you

want to see them. Not as bad, and with a halfway decent reputation (due to the presence of Erich von Stroheim), *THE CRIME OF DOCTOR CRESPI* (1935) seems to suffer from weakness in plotting and characterization, but is saved by John Auer's direction and effective lighting and photography.

If there are any drawbacks to Senn's dissection of these films, it is in his tendency to repeat himself in the different sections of an individual chapter. Two examples come to mind: in the *WEREWOLF OF LONDON* (1935) chapter, Jack Pierce's "light" lycanthrope makeup is discussed similarly in both the "assets" and "production" sections. In the *CRESPI* chapter, Senn has barely finished quoting von Stroheim's disclaimer that the film was really "the crime of Republic, the screenwriter, and the director" when, a mere five paragraphs later, he repeats the same quote!

As a supplement thrown in for good measure, an appendix devoted to "borderline" or "lost" films of the era is included, offering an additional 69 titles in thumbnail sketch form. A second appendix tallies votes by prominent fandom writers for the top 10 horror titles of the Golden Age.

Despite its hefty price tag, Bryan Senn's *Golden Horrors* delivers its weight in genre scholarship.

—Richard Scrivani

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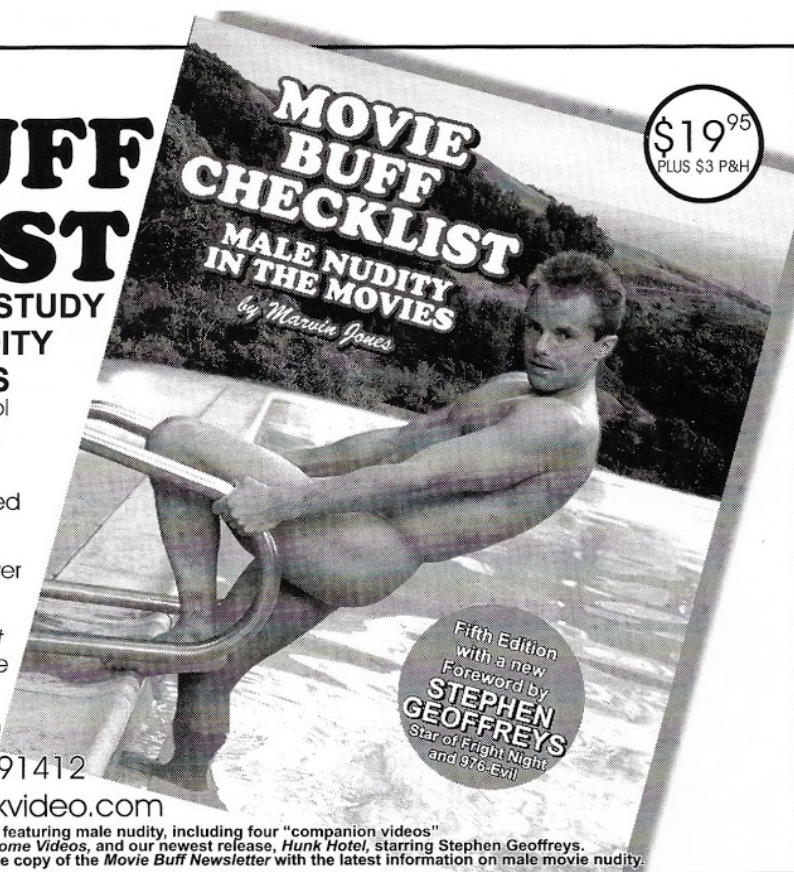
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FAY WRAY

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SS: Any regrets?

FW: Oh, a few. ROCK PRETTY BABY and those things I am not keen on, but they didn't really hurt. There's so much that is worthy about film and how it's made and who makes it. Every now and then, something extraordinary comes out. And you can't put it down. You can't put films down. They have made the world smaller. They have brought nations together. Look how people dress now in Japan. The ladies wore kimonos and now they wear Western-style clothes, don't they? Hollywood's influence is wonderfully, wonderfully strong. SS: You're absolutely right—and you're part of it.

FW: I don't know, am I? I didn't wear anything that could be copied in KING KONG. (Laughs) But whatever I wore—or didn't—it was appropriate to the scene!

We suddenly realized that it was after two in the morning and we hadn't stopped talking. I thanked the legendary leading lady profusely and we promised to keep in touch. As I left the building, the doorman said, "She is some lady, isn't she?" I told him that I had to admit that she was, indeed. "Donald Trump was here to see someone the other day and ran into her in the lobby. He knew her right away," the doorman told me proudly.

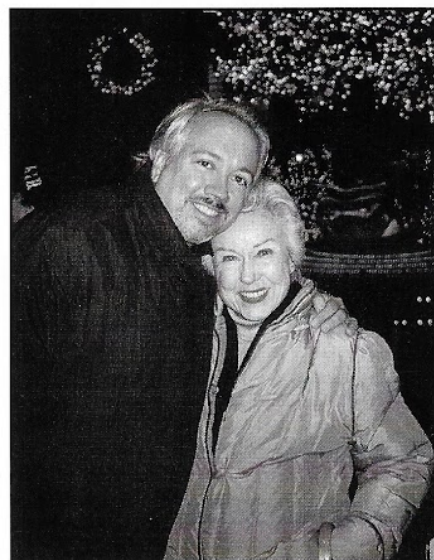
"Oh, really? What did he say?"

"Five words," said the doorman.

"'Twas beauty killed the beast.'"

I smiled as I hit the sidewalk and the cold December air. Trump was right.

Rick McKay lives in New York City. He is a writer who was recently named San Francisco's Outstanding Journalist of 1997, and is also an independent filmmaker and PBS producer. He loves hearing from Scarlet Readers via e-mail at rckmck@aol.com.



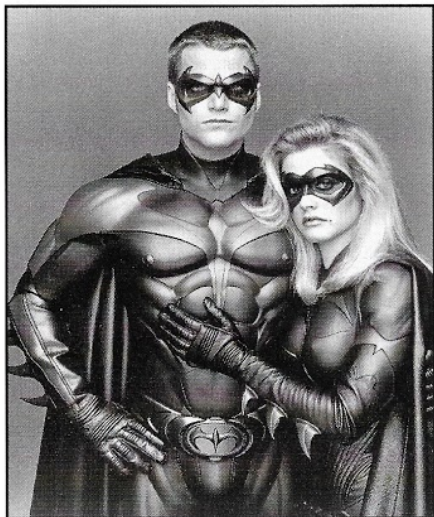
Fay Wray with interviewer Rick McKay at Rockefeller Center.

SCREEN AND SCREEN

Continued from page 27

Haller assembled a veteran cast, featuring Boris Karloff, Nick Adams, Patrick Magee, and Freda Jackson, but they're mainly cardboard characters, including love interest Suzan Farmer (a character not present in Lovecraft's story). The real star of DIE, MONSTER, DIE! is "The Witley Place" itself. The palatial rooms are dressed with artifacts and collectibles that have begun to decay, through earthly neglect and supernatural force. Haller pivots the camera as it moves from room to room in frequent tracking shots. This camera movement highlights the sets and the props, but lessens identification with the characters themselves.

The most intriguing point of editing occurs when Karloff's daughter Suzan Farmer goes upstairs with a tray of food. She enters through a bedroom door and declares "Father, I brought your dinner." But when she serves the meal, it's her mother who's in bed behind the curtains!



Though many screams away from being considered a horror classic, DIE, MONSTER, DIE! has been afforded a respectable presentation. The 2:35-1 aspect ratio delivers the full scope of the director's vision. The actual tracking shots sometimes appear partially squeezed whilst the camera pans lovingly from corner to corner. Although there are occasional instances of mild speckling and minor print flaws, the color hues are richly preserved. This laserdisc edition is far superior to the panned-and-scanned VHS version.

—John F. Black

BATMAN & ROBIN
Image Entertainment
Three Sides CLV
\$39.95

Holy Headache! Joel Schumacher's second foray into Gotham City proved to be considerably less financially successful than his first visit—surprising, really, because BATMAN & ROBIN is a better outing than the previous BATMAN FOREVER (1995), with a better story, better villains (or at least better villainous performances), a bigger Gotham (chock full of statues of naked men), and a bigger, better chin on the hunky actor playing the Dark Knight.

The story, admittedly overcrowded with character and incident, concerns the malevolent machinations of Mr. Freeze (a surprisingly good Arnold Schwarzenegger) and Poison Ivy (Uma Thurman), separately and together, to bring civilization to its frigid knees. Two other baddies pulled from the pages of DC Comics haunt the sidelines: the musclebound Bane (the late Joep Swenson) and Dr. Jason Woodrue (John Glover), the latter forgoing the pleasure of becoming the deadly Floronic Man to instead become the dead first victim of the poisonous Ivy.

The strong, well-played subplot concerns faithful butler Alfred Pennyworth

(Michael Gough) coming down with a potentially fatal ailment, the very one that would have bumped off Nora Fries (Vendela K. Thommesen) had her pop-sickie hubby not given her one hell of a stiffy. It's all about family, you see, with Alfred worrying about who's going to care for Master Bruce and Master Dick (George Clooney and Chris O'Donnell) after he's gone, Master Bruce struggling to care for the man who's cared for him all his life, Master Bruce and Master Dick learning to trust one another, and Alfred's niece Barbara (Alicia Silverstone) showing up just in time to become Batgirl—needlessly, because the film would have gotten along much better without her.

The letterboxed laser (at 1.85:1) looks gorgeous, the side breaks are unobtrusive, and hopefully BATMAN & ROBIN will have a longer life on the small screen than it did on the big.

—Drew Sullivan

THE SATAN BUG
MGM/UA Home Video
Two Sides CLV
\$39.95

Not the greatest film ever made by John Sturges by a long shot, THE SATAN BUG is, however, an enjoyable little thriller. All the ingredients are present for a fine production including a screenplay by James Clavell and Edward Anhalt, a score by Jerry Goldsmith, and fine players such as Richard Basehart, Anne Francis, Dana Andrews, Ed Asner, and Simon Oakland. George Maharis is in it, too.

The plot concerns vials of engineered viruses stolen from a secret US government biological warfare lab. Classic Cold War stuff, but this time it isn't the Soviets, it's a terrorist megalomaniac who wants to either rule the world or be the last man standing. Ex-spy Lee Barrett

Continued on page 73

A HUNGER FOR HORROR

Continued from page 67

MUMMY, and THE BLACK CAT—echoed the young men of America. They were inexperienced, inadequate, and impotent against the power of the villains, even to the extent that they occasionally didn't even believe in the villain's existence! The heroes were generally American (Peter Alison in THE BLACK CAT, Jack Driscoll in KING KONG) or an American actor portraying a citizen of another country (Leon Waycoff, destined to become the all-American MEET ME IN ST. LOUIS father figure under the name Leon Ames, as Dupin in MURDERS IN THE RUE MORGUE). Rarely did the heroes even get to dispel the villains, relying instead on their elders (Van Helsing in DRACULA) or powers beyond their control (the goddess Isis in THE MUMMY).

The major factor that differentiated the films from the realities of America was the repetitive sense of closure offered by horror movies. Even if the hero was unable to fend off the villain, he was reunited with the heroine for the film's conclusion. All that was bad (European or otherwise) was defeated and normalcy, as defined by the restoration of happiness and all that is good, returned. This was true even of the villains in sequels, since individual films gave the appearance of defeat to whatever monster was on hand. Perhaps the one occasion on which this was not completely the case—Edward van Sloan's curtain speech in DRACULA, that claimed vampires really do exist—fell to the cutting-room floor, deleted after its first release.

It is clear that spectators' responses to the revived DRACULA and FRANKENSTEIN had shifted from earlier in the decade, with giggles seemingly generated as often as chills. Yet, with the exception of DRACULA's curtain speech, the two films and other reissued horrors were unchanged. Clearly, the 1938 audience were different people than those who filled theaters earlier in the decade, even though many had in fact seen the films in 1931-32. No longer searching for a quick fluctuation in the economy, the revival audience reaction was tempered by a long-term depression, with the only end in sight being war. The recession of 1937—occurring after FDR scaled back some New Deal projects—reinforced the necessity for a paternalistic government intervention in both the economy and people's lives. Many movie patrons had gone through too much to



Basil Rathbone meets Boris Karloff in the movie that launched the second great series of horror films: SON OF FRANKENSTEIN (1939)

find fictional horror a scare; they found occasional laughs in scare tactics that had become ineffectual, and solace in horror film conclusions. The intense interest of children—many of whom were apparently not frightened either—was mediated by the realities of the thirties, the only realities they had known.

Though not all spectators reacted with grins, the prolonged conditions of the Depression and the threat of war allowed audiences to respond in a greater number of ways to DRACULA and FRANKENSTEIN than they had before. Whether met by titters or jitters, the two horrors reinforced not only the merits of the double bill, but its ability to achieve success by pairing two or more films of the same genre. Their economic success allowed the genre, like the monsters themselves, to live again in a horde of new horror films. They quieted the rumble of audience hunger pangs for horror, a hunger which continued unsated into World War Two.



DANGEROUS GAMES

Continued from page 36

assembled one of the most gifted teams of artisans ever gathered for a motion picture. THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME benefited equally from this extraordinary collection of talent. It would be unreasonable to expect A GAME OF DEATH producer Herman Schlom to duplicate the original's success without Cooper's unique advantages. Perhaps even Cooper could not have made a better film than A GAME OF DEATH, if he had been forced to produce his version with the same resources given Schlom.

As Rainsford, John Loder, like most of the cast, is adequate but bland. Long can't hold a candle to Wray as young Miss Trowbridge, whose name for some reason is changed from Eve to Ellen in this version. Lewton regular Russell Wade fares reasonably well as her drunken brother, renamed Robert. Edgar Barrier contributes the strongest performance (in the film's easiest role) as the hunter, General Kreiger. Horror buffs may recognize Barrier from Universal's lavish PHANTOM OF THE OPERA (1943).

The first third of A GAME OF DEATH is copied virtually shot-for-shot from THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME. The entire shipwreck sequence is stock footage from the original production. The dialogue parrots Creelman's, but is streamlined by Houston. For comparison, consider this brief exchange between the general and Rainsford. In THE

MOST DANGEROUS GAME, Zaroff asks Rainsford: "Our feminine guest is easily perturbed. If I could beg you to put a good face upon the matter, assume a cheerfulness you may not feel?" In GAME OF DEATH, Kreiger asks simply: "As a favor to me, be careful what you say, how you act. I don't want to have her upset. You know how women are."

The familiar Gothic interiors of the castle, while impressive, aren't as dark and foreboding here because photographer J. Roy Hunt's nondescript lighting lacks the subtlety of Gerrard's work.

GAME OF DEATH isn't entirely without worthwhile innovations. Robert Trowbridge is a far stronger character than hapless Martin. Robert isn't an unwitting lush; he's only feigning intoxication. Secretly, he and his sister are searching for an opportunity to escape. He accompanies Rainsford and Ellen when they break into Kreiger's trophy room. (More stock footage!)

The trio escape the room undetected and concoct a desperate plan: Rainsford tricks Kreiger into believing he approves of the general's "game." Kreiger offers to take Rainsford hunting alongside him, and Rainsford accepts (planning to turn against Kreiger and gun down the general at his first opportunity). However, Kreiger learns of this deceit and locks Rainsford in his room while Kreiger

Continued on page 72



These two photographs perfectly capture the correlation between sex and violence in **THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME** (1932). Rainsford (Joel McCrea) finds himself locked in a clinch with both Eve Trowbridge (Fay Wray) and Count Zaroff (Leslie Banks).

DANGEROUS GAMES

Continued from page 71

hunts and kills Robert. Robert's plight is much more unnerving here than in the original, because he knows full well what's coming, but is powerless to prevent it.

Finally, Kreiger turns his attention to Rainsford and Ellen. Looking for even the slightest advantage, Rainsford goads the general into hunting himself and the girl immediately, even though Kreiger is tired, having just returned from hunting Robert. This well-acted scene proves nearly as entertaining as the chase itself, an abbreviated and clumsily executed rehash of the original, again utilizing a great deal of stock footage. Clark's classy sets (viewed in the stock shots) and art directors Albert S. D'Agostino and Lucas Croxton's bargain basement jungle exteriors clash obviously. **A GAME OF DEATH** lifts Rainsford's endgame with Kreiger blow-by-blow from **THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME**.

Despite its many faults, **A GAME OF DEATH** remains an above-average "time-killer," to use the critical jargon of its day. It's not **THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME**, it's not the remake it could have been, yet it compares favorably to many other B-grade thrillers of its era (though not to those produced on the same lot by Lewton.) Certainly, **A GAME OF DEATH** is superior to anything produced by Universal's fabled fright factory in 1945 (when that studio released **HOUSE OF DRACULA**, **HOUSE OF FEAR**, **THE JUNGLE CAPTIVE**, and three installments of its Inner Sanctum series).

The leadership of director Wise ensured the film would be at least watchable. Wise was never a stylist, but he is a master storyteller. Like contemporaries such as Michael Curtiz and Howard Hawks, Wise at his best is invisible. He sidesteps complex dolly shots, inventive camera angles, and anything else that would distract audiences from the story unfolding on the screen. Wise's other 1945 horror show, **THE BODY SNATCHER**, is arguably the finest chiller of the decade.

A GAME OF DEATH didn't stand much of a chance at the box office. By 1945, in the waning days of the Golden Age of Horror, audiences were growing weary of scary movies. Those still willing to pay for a good fright were queuing up to see MGM's smash **THE PICTURE OF**

DORIAN GRAY or the Lewton-produced chillers **THE BODY SNATCHER** and **ISLE OF THE DEAD** or Universal's juvenile **HOUSE OF DRACULA**. Critics dismissed **A GAME OF DEATH** out of hand: Even *The New York Times*, which had been kind to **THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME**, slammed the remake in a pithy, one-paragraph notice. "It certainly is curious, isn't it? The stuff that some people pay to see!" wrote critic Bosley Crowther.

Like **A GAME OF DEATH**, future remakes would borrow heavily from Cooper's **MOST DANGEROUS GAME** and less from Connell's. The next celluloid rendering of the story, **RUN FOR THE SUN** (1956), starred Trevor Howard and Richard Widmark. **BLOODLUST**, a zero-budget independent starring Robert Reed (of **BRADY BUNCH** fame), followed in 1961.

BLOODLUST, which fails to credit Connell, is notable for reworking the story as an antiwar parable. The hunter, in this retelling, was a peaceable scholar until being recruited into military service. "I had never killed anything in my life," he rants. "What had been an unpleasant duty became a pleasure, then it developed into a passion, and then a lust, a lust for blood." To make up for its amateurish acting and laughable production values, writer/producer/director Ralph Brooke heaps on the gore. His additions to the story include a laboratory stocked with butchered human bodies.

Other movies either based on or borrowing elements from Connell's story include **JOHNNY ALLEGRO** (1949), **THE BLACK CASTLE** (1952), **THE BLACK FOREST** (1954), **THE NAKED PREY** (1966), **THE PERVERSE COUNTESS** (1973), **DEADLY GAME** (1991), **SLAVE GIRLS FROM BEYOND INFINITY** (1988), **HARD TARGET** (1993), and **SURVIVING THE GAME** (1994). **HARD TARGET**, directed by action guru John Woo, is likely the best of this sorry assortment, in spite of star Jean-Claude Van Damme.

It's been more than three years since the last remake, so we're due for another one any time now. I wonder if anyone would be interested in a version featuring a werewolf?



Mark Clark's book, **Painted Monsters: Great Performances in Horror Cinema**, will be published in 1999.

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SCREEN AND SCREEN

Continued from page 70

(Maharis) is summoned from retirement (the best guys for the job are always retired), to track down the vials and prevent a whole lot of death. Of the two viruses stolen, the lesser could kill hundreds of thousands before dissipating into harmlessness. But the other—known ominously as the Satan Bug—will continue to multiply and never dissipate, even after every last living thing on Earth is dead! As one may expect, this particular vial gets put through a lot of nerve-wracking juggling. To prove their sincerity, the terrorists release the lesser virus on a Florida Key and kill thousands, then announce their intent to do the same to Los Angeles if their demands are not met.

We are led on the proverbial merry chase around the American Southwest as the good guys chase the bad guys, and try to figure out the identity of the unknown mastermind. The vials change hands more often than a scream queen at a horror con, and every time we think Maharis has the drop on the bad guys, or the bad guys have the drop on him, something else happens to reverse the situation. I can't say that this worked every time, since it did get tedious toward the end.

While enjoyable, *The SATAN BUG* is just a notch or two shy of what it could have been. As a germ warfare story, *THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN* (1971) outshines it. As a spy versus megalomaniac story, the contemporary *GOLDFINGER* is far more satisfying. Maharis may not have been the ideal choice for the Bondian type this role required. Asner, however, is a wonderfully menacing thug, especially after a punch to his throat gives him an evil-sounding rasp to his already threatening voice.

Packaged simply with a rather scary picture of Maharis on the front, and with a blurb and chapter stops noted on the back, the two-sided extended play disc is digitally transferred in 2.35:1 letterbox format. The digital sound track features the standard audio of the film, while the analog track isolates the music and effects.

—John E. Payne

DANTE'S PEAK

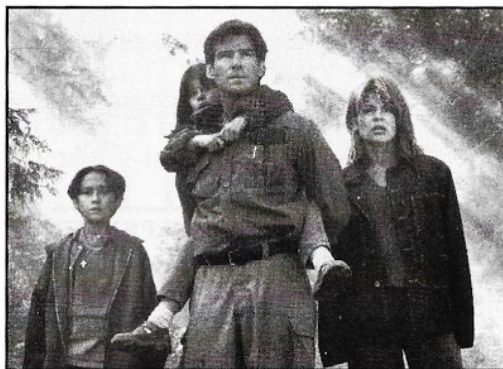
Universal Studios Home Video

Two Sides CLV

\$34.95

DANTE'S PEAK is a satisfying, get-your-blood-pumping disaster film, nothing more, nothing less. Using the Mount Saint Helens eruption as its inspiration, Gale Anne Hurd's film is set in the small Pacific Northwest town of Dante's Peak, nestled beneath the extinct (oh, yeah?) volcano for which it is named. From the serene opening pan of this close little community, throughout the obligatory introductory scenes of its friendly citizens and attractive, amiable mayor (Linda Hamilton), the experienced disaster film viewer can't help but think, "Oh, these people are screwed!"

Into the middle of the town's festivities to celebrate winning an award for being one of the best vacation spots in the Northwest (oh, these people are royally screwed!), comes a U.S. Geological Survey team who suspect that the volcano may be active and about to blow. The savvy but burned out Old Hand among them (Pierce Brosnan) is certain the mountain is definitely gonna blow. In the best tradition of *JAWS*, the locals don't believe it and the town council wants him run out, while his boss (Charles Hallahan) wants him to back off for political reasons. We all know he's right, of course, or there'd be no movie. He and the mayor predictably strike up a relationship while the subtle telltale signs of active volcanism begin to show themselves—for instance, the teen couple found boiled to death in a hot spring.



The mayor has a crotchety old mother-in-law who predictably refuses to leave her cabin on the mountain even if it is going to explode under her. We figure she's screwed, too.

The volcano blows. (By that, I mean it explodes.) But rather than documenting the characters' efforts to escape, the film hands us a twist—the mayor's two precocious kids have gone to rescue grandma, so Brosnan and Hamilton must run into the disaster to save them. Most of this is quite exciting but for a few technical nits, such as fast, Hawaii-style lava pouring from a Cascade Range volcano. This sequence also features the best tire advertisement in history as Brosnan successfully drives his truck over a flaming lava field to safety, and the most improbable rescue of a family dog since *INDEPENDENCE DAY*.

The effects scenes are frighteningly convincing, even to this jaded watcher of the Discovery Channel. Scenes of mudflows and floods wiping out bridges, ashfalls and pyroclastic clouds blasting through town, could be right out of a NOVA documentary. These effects bear no resemblance to the model railroad miniatures we've seen in flood scenes in past films. (That dam-break scene in *SUPERMAN: THE MOVIE* still reminds me of my Uncle Wally's railroad layout.)

The laserdisc is available in both a standard package featuring the movie only in a simple sleeve, and a more expensive deluxe edition with many extras. Both are in 2.35:1 widescreen letterbox format.

—John E. Payne

RASPUTIN, THE MAD MONK

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Few names in history are so familiar and so misunderstood as Gregori Yefimovich Novik, aka Rasputin. Rasputin was a healer, a rake, a drunkard, and a fornicator. He was also a patriot and one of the most influential individuals in the court of Russia's final monarchy. In *RASPUTIN, THE MAD MONK* (1966), Hammer's aim is squarely on the sensational. The Dumas is nonexistent. Nicholas II and daughters Olga, Tatiana, and Anastasia are never mentioned. Nor is mention made of the Czarovitch Alexis' hemophilia, a condition Rasputin eased with hypnotic and relaxation techniques and, most importantly, a condition which gave Rasputin his primary inroad to Alexandra's confidence. Indeed, almost every incident is either fabricated or badly distorted.

History aside, the film begins with a bang. In the opening sequence, Rasputin (Christopher Lee) heals the wife of an innkeeper (Derek Francis), drinks prodigious amounts of wine, dances with and later seduces the innkeeper's daughter, severs the hand of her boyfriend with a farm tool, and makes good his escape from an angry mob. Meeting up with Sonia (Barbara Shelley), lady-in-waiting to the Czarina Alexandra (Renee Asherson), Rasputin convinces Sonia to stage an accident involving the Czarovitch Alexis (Robert Duncan). Rasputin heals the boy, thus gaining the confidence of Alexandra. The Czarina installs Rasputin in a lush home ("Not bad for a peasant!"), where, with companion Dr. Boris Zargo (Richard Pasco), he plots to control the Russian monarchy.

As Rasputin becomes carried away with his growing power, his enemies increase. Finally, Zargo can bear no more. He convinces two members of the aristocracy, Ivan (Francis Matthews) and Peter (Nicholas Pennell), of Rasputin's growing threat. Ivan lures Rasputin to his home on the pretext of an assignment with his sister, Vanessa (Suzan Farmer). There, the Mad Monk learns you can't cross all the people all the time.

RASPUTIN has solid performances by all concerned, but Christopher Lee shines in particular. His Rasputin, crude yet dynamic, overwhelms the film. The

Continued on page 74



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MUSIC VAULT

Continued from page 50

the vein of the current Neo-Disney Broadway song spectaculars, only song lyrics are included in the booklets. Composers and songwriters are cited only in conjunction with the printed lyrics (and in extremely small print among the CD credits), but with no biographical details or additional credits at all. These long-in-the-works CDs were originally considered for release in boxed editions (à la Rhino's **WIZARD OF OZ**) and with similarly detailed booklets. Given Disney's penchant for recycling, such deluxe editions may yet materialize, but in the meantime it's unfortunate that the contributions of Disney's key composers and musicians are not more clearly lauded on these otherwise definitive CDs.

The **BAMBI** disc in particular serves as a vivid, poignant reminder of the stirring power and heart-crushing lyricism of the early Disney, and of the unique musical genius of the gifted and tragic Frank Churchill. Without question, it's the key reissue of the lot, and an important document of peak Golden Age Hollywood scoring in general. More than 50 years after **BAMBI**'s original release, and

particularly in comparison with most work being done (visually, dramatically, and certainly musically) in animation today, its power still holds. Interestingly, a review of the film's recent reissue on video ended on a once-familiar cautionary note, that **BAMBI** just might be "too intense" for small children. Given the alarming **VILLAGE OF THE DAMNED** precocity of most nineties small children, it's reassuring to know that something still is . . .



Ross Care has written on early Disney for *Sight and Sound*, *Funny World*, *CinemaScore*, *Film Score Monthly*, and *The Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress*.

SCREEN AND SCREEN

Continued from page 73

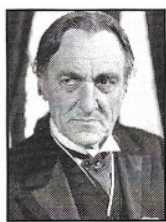
sets are beautifully designed and lit. Photography and costumes are typical of Hammer's better output, making for a very attractive film. Budgetary constraints are occasionally evident, and a sharp eye will note portions of the castle from **DRACULA**—**PRINCE OF DARK-**

NESS and a second or two of a ballroom scene lifted from the 1956 **ANASTASIA**.

Elite presents the film in the original 2.1:1 aspect ratio, with 26 chapter stops. The monaural soundtrack is cleanly transferred to the digital tracks. The analog tracks offer a running commentary by Christopher Lee, Barbara Shelley, Suzan Farmer, and Francis Matthews. Lee tends to dominate the commentary with Shelley a mild second. Farmer and Matthews are barely heard from and primarily provide affirmation to what has been noted by Lee and Shelley. Though sometimes sounding like a teatime chat, the commentary provides some fascinating, and at times, astonishing revelations. (Note Lee's own contribution to the legends surrounding Rasputin's assassination and his explanations as to why some names and incidents were changed.) A 10-minute gap in the analog audio tracks occurs about 45 minutes into the film. A theatrical trailer and combo TV spots (**RASPUTIN** and **THE REPTILE**) round out the package.

Approaching **RASPUTIN** as history will lead to disappointment. Approach **RASPUTIN** as classic Hammer, however, and you should be delighted.

—Michael Spampinato



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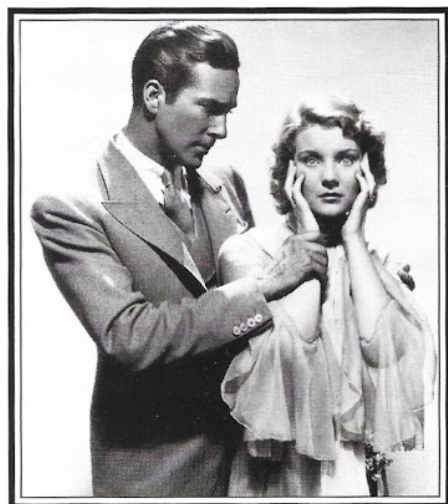
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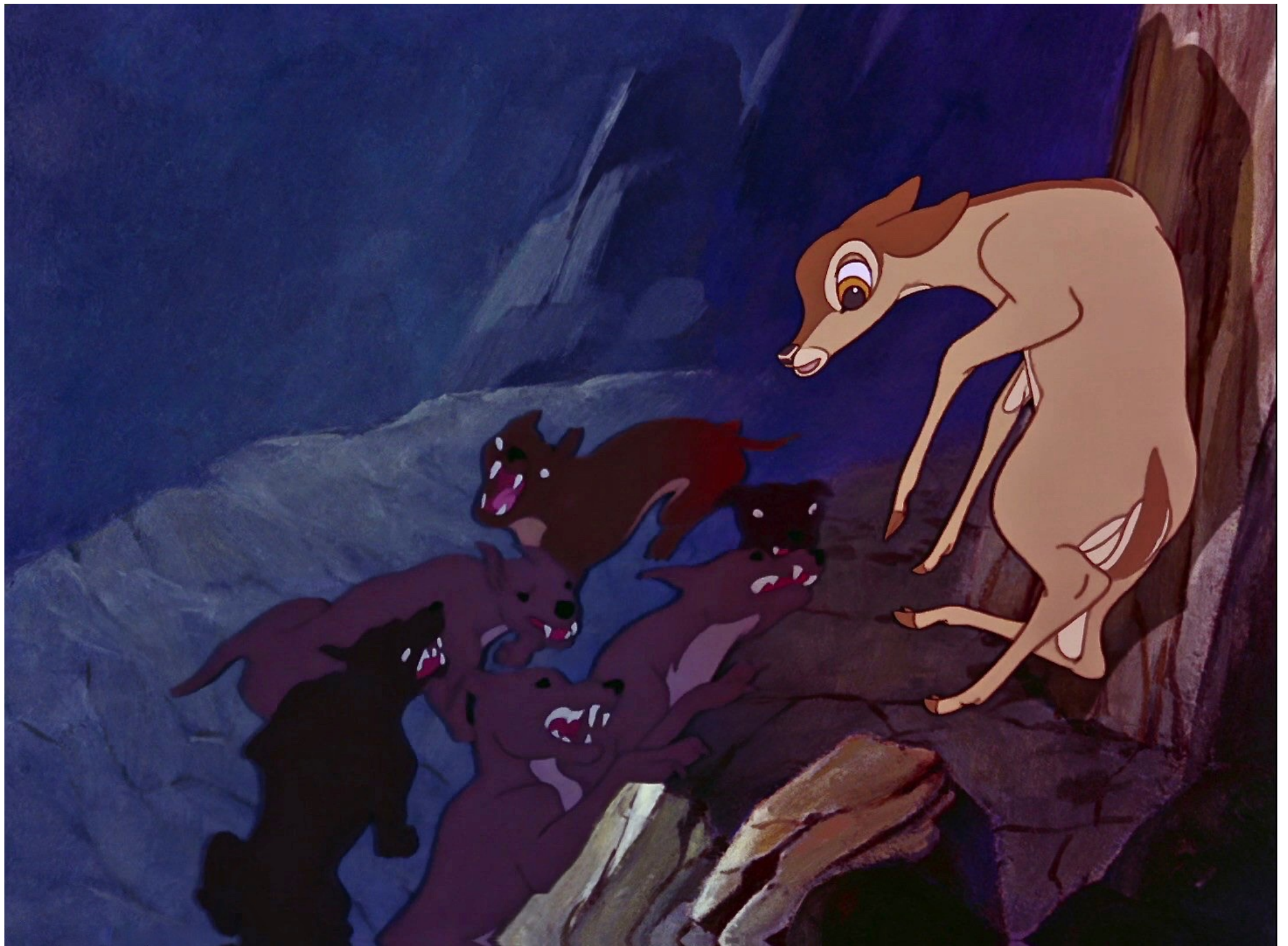




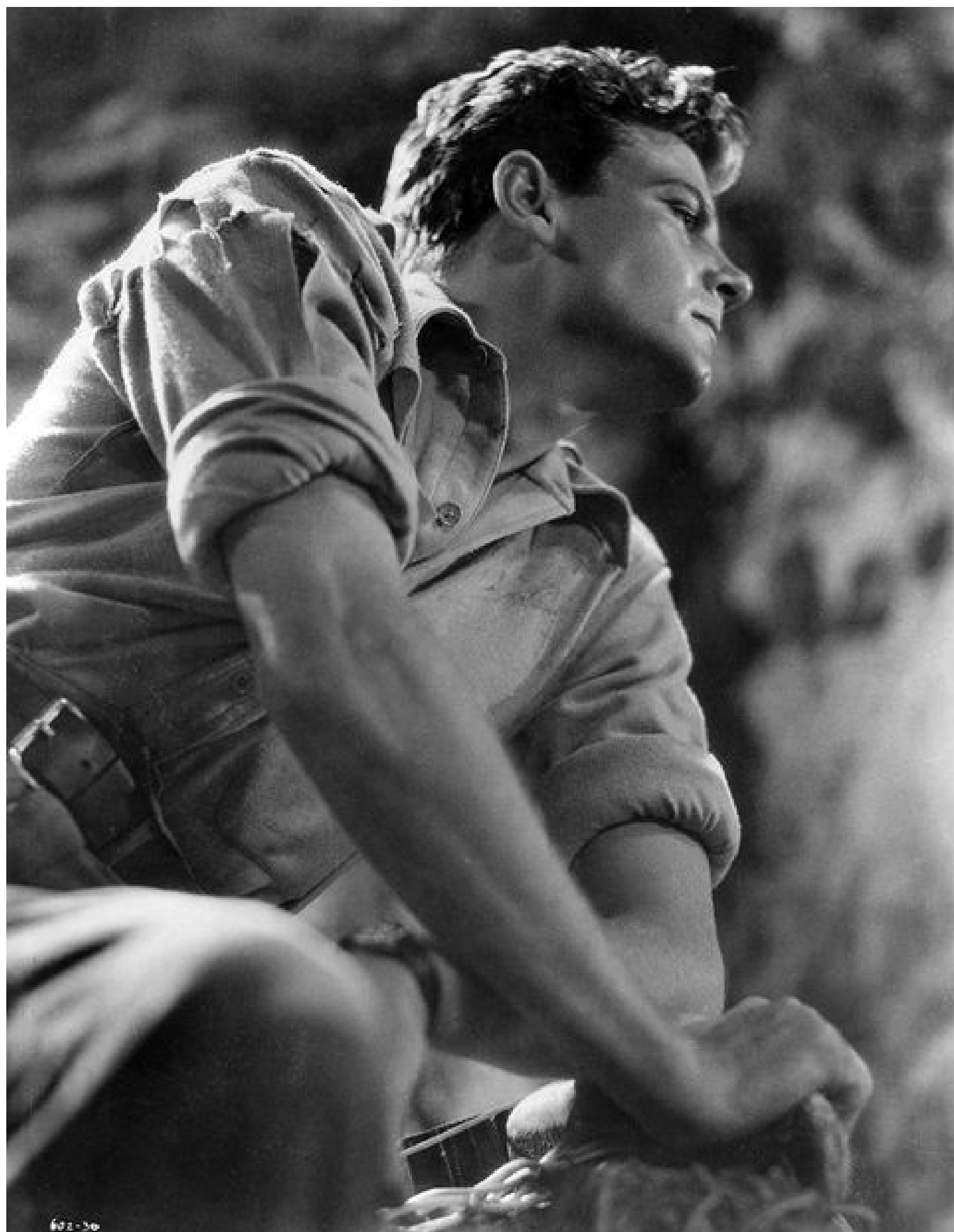


















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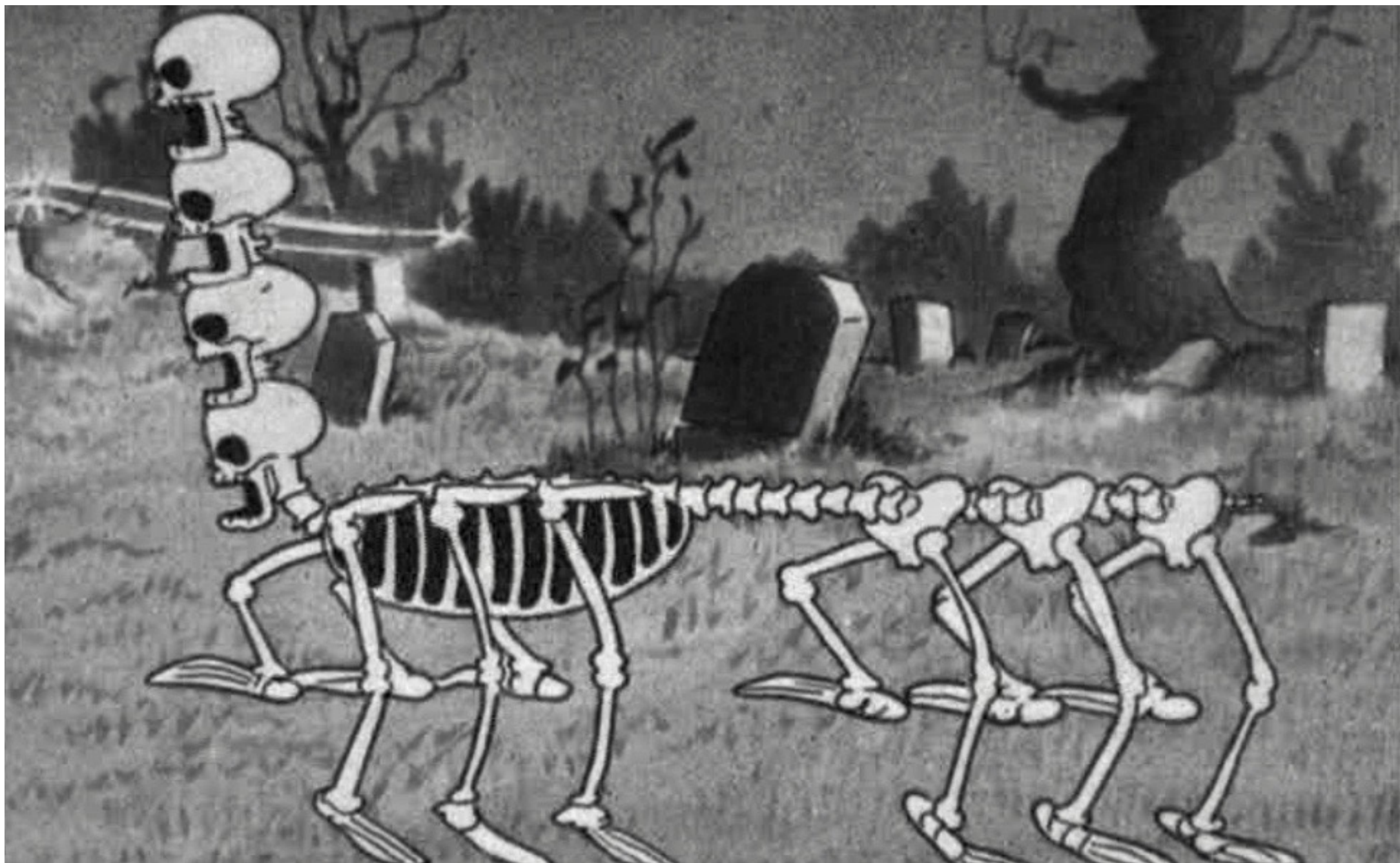






















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